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## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir:

The staff of New Directions would like to extend sincere apologies to Miss Muriel Rukeyser and the Indiana University Press for the unfortunate wording in the New Directions advertisement which appeared in the Spring 1971 issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW, page 9. We were in error to state that "Configurations" by Octavio Paz, published in April of this year by us, was the first collection of the Mexican poet's work to appear in English. In 1963 Indiana University Press published "Selected Poems of Octavio Paz" in Muriel Rukeyser's excellent translations. Clearly the "Selected Poems of Octavio Paz" was the first collection in English.

BONNIE ARMSTRONG
Advertising Manager
New Directions

*New York, N. Y.*

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MARGARET MARSHALL

# An American Memoir

## I *Raft River Valley*

Raft River, which got its name because beavers, building their dams, had made it so wide at its mouth that it could be crossed only by raft, rises near the Utah-Idaho border, flows mainly north, and empties into Snake River. Its central valley is wide and shallow and tips toward the east, toward the river and the base of the Black Pine Mountains beyond. There is one other sizeable stream in the area. This is Cassia Creek, which flows in from the Goose Creek Mountains to the west, crosses the valley, and joins Raft River.

As I knew it, in the early years of this century, Raft River Valley was sagebrush country, but in the eighteen-seventies, it was also a natural pasture. Every spring, the valley floor spreading out from the river showed a rich crop of bunch grass, which cures itself and stays sweet all winter. Forage was so abundant that great herds of cattle were driven in, to winter there or to rest and take on fat before being driven to farther points, to Montana or California. Along the river were a few permanent ranches, which served as headquarters for the owners, or foremen, and the cowhands of herds in transit. There were some ranches also on Cassia Creek in the west. But there were few women and children in the region because it was considered unsafe for families. The local Indians, though they had been "pacified" in the sixties, still posed a threat to isolated settlers.

In the spring of 1872, a pair of covered wagons and a little bunch of horses, ridden or trailed by the two men and the older boys in the party, came to a halt on the south bank of Cassia Creek. The wagons were stowed with the families and household gear of Charles Parke, my maternal grandfather, and his brother Thompson; another ranch was in the making, a mile down the creek from the Conant place and somewhat less than that from the places of two brothers named Rice—"Black Bill" and Del.

The small caravan, which had started from the town of Willard,

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Utah, had been on the way much longer than the distance warranted. "We were eleven days on the road my father hobbled a fine horse for the night and he got lost and we stoped to hunt him." So my mother wrote me sixty-eight years later when she was old and time hung heavy on her hands and she was recalling the early days. She was Charles Parke's daughter Catharine, then eight years old:

> We drove horses and oxen on the wagons. I remember the day before we got to where we settled, my uncle's wife Aunt Jule drove her team into a creek [always pronounced crick] that was called Clear Creek. One of the horses balked in the stream. She had a crate of chickens tied to the back of the wagon and they were all drowned in the high water. I remember driving through the same stream with my mother. She drove a yoke of oxen and I can remember hearing her call out to the oxen "Whoa! Haw! Gee! Buck!" We always called it Chicken Creek after that.

There was no house ready for the women and children who spilled out of the wagons; the building of cabins was part of the summer's work. The two families went right on camping out, in the covered wagon boxes which were set on logs on the ground.

Charles Parke was an old western hand. He was born in Eugene, Indiana, in 1829, probably of Scotch-Irish stock. He went to California during the gold rush but later doubled back to Utah. His mother had been a Mormon and he called himself one, but even Mother admitted that he was not a very good one. "Charlie Parke," she would say—she liked the sound of his full name—"wasn't as good a Mormon as he should have been but he'd never let anybody abuse the Mormons. He'd just say, 'Stranger, my mother was a Mormon,' and if the fellow knew what was good for him he'd take it back."

Charlie Parke died before I was born. Most of what I heard about him I heard from Mother, and her remarks about him run together in my memory. He was a real frontiersman. He had a wild streak in him a mile wide. He swore like a trooper, and every so often he'd let out a yell that like to scared you to death. He feared neither God nor man and loved a fight. But he was full of fun, too, and played the damnedest practical jokes. He rode hard. He drank hard. He'd pour a little whisky into his hand, Mother said, smell it, and say, "By God, that's good whisky. Smells like henshit."

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Soon after the arrival on Cassia Creek, Kate went with her father to see "Black Bill" Rice. It was early in the morning and Mr. Rice was wearing a bathrobe. Kate was wide-eyed at the sight of a man in what looked like a woman's get-up and asked her father, in a whisper, what it was. In a stage whisper, Grandfather replied that Mr. Rice was about to be confined.

Once, with a friend, Grandfather was driving a team of mules hauling a heavy load—sacks of grain—over a "dugway," a track gouged out up and around a mountain, just wide enough for a wagon. The friend, who was scared, urged Charlie Parke to take it easy. As they reached the highest point and started down, he repeated his warning. Charlie Parke leapt to his feet, shouting, "I'll be God damned if anybody's going to tell *me* how to drive a team!" Then he flung the reins over the mules' backs and let out a yell that scared them into a dead run down the narrow curving track. Wagon and mules went over the side. The men and animals survived—I don't know about the grain—but Grandfather carried the scars of the crash to the end of his life.

Grandfather wore his religion lightly, but he did observe—or take advantage of—one Mormon practice. He was a polygamist. He had three wives altogether, but he separated from his first wife before he married his second; his household consisted of the second and third wives and their children. The third wife was my grandmother Margaret Alice Watterson, for whom I was named.

Charlie Parke, I am sure, went west for the hell of it; Margaret Watterson was the daughter of pioneers preoccupied with heaven. Her parents, William and Mary Colvin Watterson, had lived originally in or near Peel on the Isle of Man; Margaret, too, for she was born there in 1834. William was a fisherman and owned his own boat; his ownership of a boat was stressed, perhaps because it denoted status. For the rest, no memories have come down of the life in the Isle of Man, and no mementoes except for a stray likeness or two of people inadequately identified and a small picture of an ancient ruin which does bear a label: "St. Patrick's Church and Round Tower, Peel Castle."

To Peel, in the early eighteen-forties, came fishers of men, missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) who traveled in pairs. The Wattersons were converted to the new religion and with it to the new world. William Watterson

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sold his fishing boat and whatever else he owned that could not be transported, and the family migrated to America. They landed in New Orleans where they took a steamboat up the Mississippi to Nauvoo, Illinois, then the headquarters of the church. When they arrived, the Prophet Joseph Smith himself came on board to welcome them. William Watterson bought a farm at Macedonia, twenty-one miles from Nauvoo, and the family lived there until the spring of 1846, when the Mormons, by agreement with their persecutors, began to leave Illinois. Great Grandfather Watterson, in this crisis, exchanged his farm for a yoke of oxen with which to escape. But on the first night out, the oxen plunged over a bluff and were killed. William managed to get another team, and the family moved on. They stopped at the Little Mesquite River in Iowa and there William again settled his family on a farm, where they remained until 1850. Then, in one of a hundred wagons under command of Captain Foot, the Wattersons crossed the plains to Utah, arriving in Salt Lake City on October 1.

The Wattersons were not among the distinguished first of the Mormon pioneers to reach Utah, nor of the even more illustrious handcart companies of later years, as Mother seemed to wish they had been. But as she used to say, Great Grandmother Watterson "walked most of the way across the plains, leading one child by the hand and carrying another." By "carrying" she probably meant that Great Grandmother was pregnant.

The family settled in Bountiful, in what is now Davis County, Utah. William died there in 1855. His wife and their four children remained in Bountiful until 1860, when they moved to a farm in Cache Valley near the town of Logan.

The Wattersons, unlike Charlie Parke, were good Mormons, members of that body of sturdy, hard-working believers who enabled Brigham Young to set up an agricultural society and a theocracy in the path of the tides of adventure and speculation that were sweeping across the West. William Watterson took no more wives. Polygamy was proclaimed a church doctrine only in 1852; the practice must have come hard to many of the Saints who had grown to maturity in the old world in stern monogamous religions.

By necessity, the Mormons set up their Zion on a frontier, but they were always at war with the frontier. Brigham Young was particularly opposed to gold-mining. (Iron mining was another mat-

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ter.) "Gold is for paving streets," he said. "The business of a Saint is to stay at home and make his fields green."[1] The Wattersons obeyed. And Margaret Alice grew up a devoted daughter of the church. By what waywardness of chance or choice she married a wild man and what true believers called a "Jack Mormon" like Charlie Parke, who can say? Perhaps the fact that Margaret was nearing thirty and was by Mormon standards a very old maid had something to do with it. Marry him she did, in the early sixties, and she went to live with him and his other wife and family in Willard, Utah. Her double wifehood was of short duration. Soon after her first child—Catharine, my mother—was born, in 1864, the other wife died, leaving four children to Grandmother's care. Within a few years, Grandmother had three more children: another girl, named Margaret, and two boys, Ether and Lamoni, whose names were drawn from the Book of Mormon.

Charlie Parke had a farm in Willard, but he also worked away from home at times, for in 1869 he was driving a team in a construction camp near Antelope Springs, Utah. It was no ordinary construction camp. The work in hand was the laying of rails, and it culminated in the completion at Promontory, Utah,[2] which is only a few miles from Antelope Springs, of the first transcontinental railway in the United States. Charles Parke may be in the well-known photograph taken at the celebration of the driving of the final spike, but I can't identify him.

Charlie Parke may have been away from home at other times, too, but home continued to be Willard until the spring of 1872. Mother said it was a wonder he stayed in Utah as long as he did. Like Daniel Boone, Charlie Parke disliked the sight of another man's smoke. Unlike Daniel Boone, he also disliked trees—shade trees, that is, for in that country shade trees had to be planted and denoted settlement. By the seventies, Utah was showing more and more smokes, shade trees, and fences. Charlie Parke decided to move on. Prospecting for good cattle country, he found in the central valley of the Raft River just what he wanted. Plenty of grass and no fences; no settlements to speak of, and the only trees

[1] When the Gentiles began to get rich from the precious metals they had found in Utah's mountains, it was revealed to the church fathers that the Saints could also dig.

[2] Most writers, even historians and scholars, say Promontory Point—an amusing error if one consults a map.

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the willows along the water courses. He took up two half-sections of land with water rights and range rights. One of them was on Raft River itself. The other was on Cassia Creek, and this was to be the home place. There were neighbors, but the next ranch was a good distance up the creek and on the other side of it —out of sight beyond the willows and not near enough to pollute the air with its smoke. On the rising land to the north there was nothing, and the view to the south was likewise uncluttered. The few ranches on Raft River itself were several empty miles to the east. Charlie's brother Thompson, who had been living in Centerville, Utah, also decided to settle in Idaho, but he was still prospecting. Until he found what he wanted, it was decided, the two families would remain together on Cassia Creek. Thomps, as he was called, went father north two or three years later and settled on Snake River.

The day the Parkes arrived in the valley was a bright day as Mother remembered it. The grass was already "as high as a man's head" and the country looked its best. Its best, certainly, for Charlie Parke, for the curving landscape of gray sagebrush, green shining grass, and feathering golden willows was unbroken by any visible square of man-made shelter.

There were seven children in Charlie Parke's family when they went to Idaho. The four older ones—Joseph, William, Ira, and Jane—were his second wife's children. Then there were Catharine, Ether, and Lamoni; the child named Margaret had died in Utah. Great Uncle Thomps and his wife Jule had several children, and in addition there was a boy named Fred Parish who, Mother wrote, "went in that country with us."

Housebuilding was the first task, and with the running gear from the wagons the men and the older boys went into the mountains to the west to get out logs for cabins and for winter fuel—willows are no good for building and not much good for burning. With logs to haul and cattle to attend to, the men and the older boys were away from home through many a long day; the women kept house as best they could, in, or out of, the wagon boxes. Grandmother, who was timid and wished they had never left Utah, worried from morning till night about young ones getting lost in the high grass or in the willows along the creek, about the rattlesnakes and wildcats that were common in that country. Great

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Aunt Jule was by temperament far less timid than Grandmother, but both women dreaded the sight of Indians and hoped that none would come while the men were away.

Indians did come, but the great event of the first summer, at least for the eight-year-old Kate, was a bullfight, between two bulls, which provided the spectacle for the Parkes' first Fourth of July in the valley. The animals belonged to a big herd of cattle that was passing through on its way from Texas to Montana—in itself a spectacle. Mother often recalled that bullfight, with excitement that made her blue eyes glow.

The local Indian potentate was Chief Pocatello, after whom the city in Idaho is named. He and his two sons came rather often to the ranch on Cassia Creek. If the men were at home, the Indians "behaved themselves," as Mother put it. But if the men were away the Indians were "impudent," and once, during the second summer, they were very impudent indeed.

By then two log cabins had been built. On this day, wrote Mother, "the menfolks went in the mountains after logs to build another room. There were no men on the ranch, only two boys, my half-brother Joe Parke, and Fred Parish."

> After they [the men] had left that morning along came 3 buck Indians Pocatello and his 2 sons on horseback—no saddle and only a rope in the horse's mouth. They jumped off their horses, went out in the sagebrush killed 2 rabbits, pulled the skin off of them but did not take their entrails out held them over a fire they built and roasted them and eat them. They waved their arms and pointed to the land and water and said "All my land and all my water." They were very sassy.

The Indians ordered the two women to bake bread for them.

> My poor Mother baked bread all day for them said it was better to feed than fight. Aunt Jule was washing She throwed her table in front of the door, threw the henry rifle on the table and told them to go to hell and she'd be damned if she would cook them a bite. Us children were all under Aunt Jules bed frightened to death almost. One of us would slip out once in a while to see if the Indians had gone. They finally went away towards evening.

Mother told us that while Grandmother baked bread, the Indians stood in the doorway and stuck lighted matches in the cracks between the floorboards. At intervals as the day wore on, Grand-

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mother went to the window, shaded her eyes with her hand, and said she thought she saw the men coming. The Indians laughed at her, and told her what they would do to her family and her kind.

The next time Pocatello and his sons came, the men were at home. "My father and Uncle Thomps told them if they ever came back and acted that way again they would kill the whole damn bunch of them, and they behaved after that." It may be that the Parke brothers rampant did have an effect. Certainly far worse things happened to other people, and the stories of Indian outrages that filled the air kept the Parkes from ever feeling safe. There was the usual tale of the child stolen by the Indians, but this child belonged to a family the Parkes knew. There was an added fillip. The Indians spread word that they had buried the child alive, and no one could be sure they hadn't. Then there was the story about a greenhorn that Mother told as if it were a great joke. This fellow, she said, showed up one day in a fancy cowboy outfit—chaps, high-heeled boots, and all, and all brand new. He'd bought it, she guessed, in a store "back East." A few days later, one of Chief Pocatello's sons appeared wearing the same suit and riding the same horse, and "that greenhorn was never seen again."

The Indians, after many threats, finally did go on the warpath—this was after Great Uncle Thomps and his family had settled on Snake River and Charlie Parke's family was alone on the Cassia Creek ranch. It was reported that the Indians planned to come down Raft River from its junction with the Snake. Most of the settlers in the region sent their families into Utah until the trouble should blow over, but Charlie Parke said he'd be damned if he was going to be driven out by a bunch of painted Indians and made no such move. He did keep a span of mules in the barn harnessed and ready for flight to Kelton, Utah, which was fifty miles to the southeast and a station on the railroad he had helped to complete. For the rest, he and his elder sons and Fred Parish mounted guard on the roof of one of the log houses, spelling one another in a watch that went on for three days and nights. Then word came that the war party had gone down the north side of the Snake.

This story had a postscript. One of Uncle Thomps's sons ran a ferry across the Snake. In the dead of night he was routed out and forced to carry the Indian war party, in full regalia, across the

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river. They told him that if he did what he was told, they wouldn't hurt him; and Mother never tired of saying that they had kept their word. They had not, she asserted, harmed a hair on his head.

Mother's tales of the misdeeds of the Indians invariably ended with a defense of their behavior. In the letter describing the frightening day when the "3 buck Indians" had been so "sassy," she wrote:

> I often wondered why they did not kill us, but in after years I found out why they did not. Connor an Indian fighter had been in that country about 7 years before and killed most of them off. The poor Indians hid their squaws and papooses up in Connor Canyon 4 miles from our ranch. [It was named Connor Canyon in honor of his exploit.] After the soldiers had killed the bucks they found the squaws and papooses and murdered every one of them which I think was a disgrace to them and America. They should have taken them to the reservation at Fort Hall. I am a great friend of the Indians. I have heard my father say the government sent blankets to the Indians and the agents stole them. I do not blame the Indians. They were never treated right and this was their country. We believe in our religion that they are God's chosen people and that they will yet become delightsome and white.

Mother never tired of denouncing Connor in particular, and the whites in general, for their treatment of the Indians. And she had great regard for the Indian virtues. They always kept their word, she said, and were as honest as the day was long.

Life on Cassia Creek was hard. Grandmother called "that country" the lonesomest place on earth. But the kids weren't lonesome. They had chores to do; they also had horses to ride, the creek was alive with trout, there was endless excitement and escapade. Once in a while, people from other ranches came to spend the day, and sometimes away out on the flats was the sight of freighters making the trek from Kelton, Utah to Boise, Idaho. Then there were pets—pet horses and colts, cows and calves, dogs and pups, cats and kittens. One cat was especially smart. "When a dog came in the house and her kittens didn't run under the cupboard she'd box their ears. Then she'd jump on the dog's back and ride him out of the house." There were pet chickens, too, and a magpie with its tongue split to make it talk—I never heard that it did talk. And of course there was the pet deer, which was so common

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among early settlers from Maine to California that it has become a frontier legend.

> We raised a deer. We called him Dote. He was wonderful. He would go 60 miles from home to meet with other deer. The Indians all knowed him. We kept a red flannel around his neck. In the evening when the cows came home and we put them in the correll if there was a strange cow or steer that did not belong in there he would drive them out. He was very jealous of children he wasn't used to.

Like so many pet deer in the wilderness, Dote was killed by someone who didn't see or failed to honor the touch of red that marked him as a member of a family. "Finally," wrote my mother, "a neighbor shot him. We mourned his loss."

Some of her stories about Indians were peaceful. As the years passed, hostility faded, and families of Indians often came in the fall, pitched their wigwams across the "little creek" from the log houses, and stayed all winter—the little creek was the irrigation ditch that carried water for crops from Cassia Creek. The able-bodied among them went into the mountains to gather pine nuts for winter food. The old people and the young ones remained at home. The Parke kids spent many a daylight hour playing with the Indian children. "And sometimes us children would go to their camp in the evening and watch the squaws grind the wheat to make bread." The Indians borrowed things, but they always brought back anything they borrowed, even to the smallest tool.

Visitors, red or white, were not common, however, and much of the time the Parke children had only one another for company. Mother always defended polygamy (the church held that polygamy was as much advanced over monogamy as monogamy over celibacy). She seemed to assume that men were by nature polygamous, and she asserted that it was better for a man to "acknowledge his children and their mothers than turn them out in the world without a name"—Mother loved rhetoric. She further contended that plural families always lived peaceably together. To judge by her general statements, the double family on Cassia Creek was no exception. But these statements were undermined by the defensive tone in which they were delivered and by some of the specific recollections she cherished most. She often noted, as if for the record, that Grandmother loved her stepchildren as if they were her own, but there was truculence in Mother's voice and

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descendants of the stepchildren have a different impression. However that may be, it is clear to me that Kate was less than wholehearted in her acceptance of the other wife's children, and I suspect that the Mormon hymn "Love at Home" was meant to promote as well as to celebrate polygamous family affection. Mother was always careful to distinguish between her two "own" brothers and her half-sister and brothers. As a consequence, I grew up with the impression that Aunt Jane and Uncle Joe, both of whom I knew, were only half-relations. Mother was touchy about both. She was always taking digs at Aunt Jane, who was two years older than she was; and she told us over and over again a story about half-Uncle Joe that was intended, whether she knew it or not, to show that he was only half a character. The story reveals something about my mother, too, and the airs that blew about her childhood.

When Joe was twelve and Kate was nine, he dared her to drink a water-glassful of whisky. Joe filched the whisky from Grandfather's supply and the two contestants met in the log barn. At the signal, Kate drank her glassful and promptly passed out. Joe, either from a loss of nerve or a sudden access of sense, did not drink his. Kate never forgot, or let Joe or any of his relatives or friends forget, that he had welshed.

A school of sorts was set up eventually at the Conant ranch a mile up the creek. The Conant ranch was also a post office on the freighter route from Kelton to Boise. The Parke children attended the school irregularly, but they did learn to read and write and cypher. When Kate was eleven or twelve, she was sent down to Logan in Utah to live with her grandmother and go to a real school. She hated it wholeheartedly and after a few months, during which she made more than one dash for freedom, she was returned to Cassia Creek.

Mother often said that she was just like her father and that they had both been a trial to her mother—though a descendant of the other wife once told me that "Kate got her meanness as much from her mother as from Charlie Parke." Mother also claimed that she had been her father's favorite child. He probably did find her more congenial than her two own brothers, who, compared with her, were mild as milk; but she had a rival in her half-sister Jane. Still,

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there is no question that the attachment between Kate and her father was strong. Their relation took the form of a battle of wills and wits. She was forever defying him; he was forever threatening to lick her and often did. But Mother's accounts of the running battle left no doubt that they had both enjoyed it.

Kate had no more use for the insides of houses than for school, but since she was a ranch girl housework was an essential part of her life, and since she was a Mormon girl she looked forward to having a house of her own and a large family. But the work of women and girls on a ranch in frontier country was as strenuous and absorbing as the work of men and boys, and much of it was done outdoors. They not only cooked and cleaned and washed and ironed and made and mended clothes; they also milked the cows, had charge of the chickens and probably the pigs, pulled up water from the well or carried it from the creek, took care of the vegetable patch, and helped pick the fruit they canned. Grandfather approved of fruit trees and planted an orchard in the first years.

For all her love of the world outdoors, her father's world of horses and cattle, of fields and ranges, Kate Parke was never a tomboy—she frequently said so. As she grew older, she was vain of her feminine charms. She was pretty. Her hair was auburn and curly, her eyes were sky blue, her face was delicately formed. Her figure was slim and her ankles were trim. She liked the attention and the fun that fall to the lot of pretty girls, wherever they live, and she had plenty of beaus. She loved a fast ride over the flats on horseback—but she always rode sidesaddle. Her other favorite activity was dancing the whole night through.

Any child growing up on Cassia Creek in the early days had to come to terms with violence, danger, and cruelty. But the bent of a child has something to do with his responses. Kate Parke spent her first eight years, which are supposed to be crucial, in a settled Mormon community in Utah, but it was to the frontier life on Cassia Creek that she responded with all of her being. Her own brother, my Uncle Eph, had no tolerance for violence or cruelty; Mother had a taste for both. She gave lip service to the conventions; she actually despised them as unnatural. She admired excess and the defiance of control, especially in men; she reveled in violent quarrels, stormy reconciliations, and new quarrels—these were to her

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the very stuff of human relations. She professed absolute belief in her religion, but the humility and piety and peacemaking it prescribed were alien to her. What roused her and stood out in her constant talk about the only true faith were the persecutions of the Mormons, the revenge they sometimes took, and the church prophecies of what would happen to the Gentiles in the "last days."

To this child of the frontier and of Charlie Parke, civilization was of course unnatural. She never gave over her contempt for settlements, and she always looked back to the Cassia Creek of her growing up as to a lost paradise. When she was seventy-six, she set down for me in a letter a headlong list of things she remembered.

> The first night we camped after leaving Willard on Bear River. *Next* I remember when we crossed Clear Creek. *Next* the first 4 of July, the bull fight. *Next* Pocatello the Indian Chief and his two sons. *Next* Indians lighting matches and sticking them through the cracks of the floor. *Next* going to Elba [seven miles up Cassia Creek] and dancing on the dirt floor. *Next* Mother afraid of us children getting lost in the high grass. *Next* my little brother and Uncle Thompson's little girl getting lost finding them a mile away had gone to pick gum from logs. *Next* us children buying a little fawn from the Indians the one we raised his name of Dote. *Next* the Indians camping across the creek and staying all winter. *Next* loaning old George a gun him bringing it back the day he said he would. Indians coming to go in the mountains to gather pine nuts. *Next* freighters from Kelton to Boise. *Next* the school house a mile from the ranch. *Next* fishing and hunting was good. *Next* rabbits by the million. *Next* my brother sitting on the corner of the log house watching for Indians. *Next* my youngest brother hiding his playthings in the chicken coop when a certain family was coming to visit . . . *Next* the jumping from the wagon when Father was driving a wild colt.

## II—*"What Was Your Name in the States?"*

*—Frontier song*

The winter Kate turned nineteen, she fell in love with a man named Jim Wilkes. She met him at a dance—perhaps at Elba, perhaps at Malta, the cowtown five miles down the creek near Raft River. He had been in the country even longer than the Parkes. Charlie Parke had known him casually for years, but Kate had

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never met him before, to her knowledge. He was a fine-looking man, Mother told us, and a good dancer. (She always added, "So was I.") Apart from his good looks and his dancing, Jim Wilkes, one might have thought, was not the sort to attract the daughter of Charlie Parke. He was no tenderfoot, but he was soft-spoken, and both his grammar and his manners set him apart from the men Kate was used to, including her father. He was fifteen years older than she was. But the frontier contempt for civilization was often the reverse of awe; moreover, country girls have frequently been captivated by older men with worldly manners—and why not?

When Jim Wilkes rode into Raft River Valley in 1870, he had two pasts behind him though he was barely twenty-one.

His real name was Griffin Stith Marshall. He had called himself Jim Wilkes only since a spring evening in 1867 when an incident in a Virginia village had sent him into exile as a fugitive from the law.

I heard the story from my mother. Father wouldn't have considered it suitable for a little girl, but Mother had no such qualms. Mother had a strong sense of drama, and for her the story was the thing.

"Your father changed his name," she told us, "because he got in trouble back home and had to leave the country. He never done anything. No indictment was ever found"—Mother was careful to insert the formal, exonerating phrase—"but he was in a crowd one night with his brother John and this colored man was killed. He'd been a slave of your grandfather's before the war, so when he was shot they thought the Marshall boys had something to do with it. There were soldiers there, northern soldiers, but your father and his brother got away. They left the country that same night—without even saying good-bye to their mother. That was when they changed their names." "That's history," Mother would add, as she usually did when she told us a story about the early days. "Do what you will with it."

The time came when I visited the Virginia village. And I discovered not only that every word of Mother's account was true, but that the full story was adorned with details and a couple of postscripts that would have delighted her.

The name of the village is Charlotte Court House and it is the

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seat of Charlotte County. Its courthouse, built in 1823, is a handsome building, of red brick with a white portico and four white columns, overarched by venerable trees. Before the courthouse on an evening in the spring of 1867 a crowd had gathered to listen to a speech. The speaker was a Negro, who was able to make a speech only because Federal troops were camped in a grove of trees across the street. His name was Jo Holmes. He had been a slave, the butler of Judge Hunter Marshall whose plantation Roxabel was five miles from the village. Now Jo Holmes was not only a free man but also a member of the Virginia legislature.

Jo Holmes's podium was the slave block that still stands at the point where the walk from the courthouse joins the street. According to the local story, he was advocating mixed marriages. He didn't get very far with his speech. A shot was fired and Jo Holmes fell dead. The bullet, I was told, is buried in the front wall of the court house.

In the crowd were my father and his older brother John, who were home on vacation from Cliffton Academy in Fauquier County. John had been in the Confederate cavalry. (Their oldest brother Hunter had been killed in the Civil War—four days after Appomattox.) Griffin, who was only seventeen, had been too young to go to war. With them was their cousin David Morton, actually a second or third cousin, and a friend named Fred Beal.

The shot that killed Jo Holmes came from the part of the crowd where the four young men were standing. One of the four did fire the shot—then slipped the gun into the hand of a friend who threw it into the creek that runs through the hollow beside the courthouse. The Federals came running but before they could get to the scene the four boys had made their escape with the help of relatives and friends. They were hidden for several hours in a house in the village. Before dawn they were driven to Pamplin, the nearest station on the Norfolk and Western Railway, and put on a train headed west.

The four fugitives soon parted. A letter from Griffin to his older sister Mary dated May 29, 1867—I got it from the daughter of Father's sister—shows that he and John had been commended to the care of people named Taylor in country that might be Texas. There is no mention of the other two boys. The letter is written on a piece of stationery embossed in the upper left-hand corner

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with the head of an Indian and, beneath it, the legend "N. P. Co."; but there is no place name on the letter and the envelope is missing. It reads as follows:

May 29th 1867

My Dear Sister:

You must really excuse me for not writing to you sooner but I have been sick nearly ever since I have been here and the other part of the time I didn't feel like writing. I haven't had anything to do at all—we have been waiting for Mr. Taylor's son to come down here—but he has been sick and is now worse and probably never will be able to come. The old man said that he (his son) could get us better situations than anyone else and advised us to wait for him and of course as we were under his care we took his advice and are now waiting to see what is going to turn up. Mr. T. Sr went up to see about his son yesterday and we are expecting him back every day.

Morgan is well and in pretty good spirits, but I am not in good spirits, I am getting tired doing nothing and paying board.

This is the hardest country I ever saw; there isn't a tree of any consequence in two hundred miles of this place. One day it is as hot as five hundred[3] and the next day you can't wrap up and keep comfortable—now today it is very hot.

I wrote to Ma some two or three days ago; tell her to write to me and that often. Has the old fuss died out yet or not? I am very anxious to know how things are going and to know the effect that thing produced.

I haven't got anything to write about and I am going to stop. Give my love to Bee Jim and all at Roxobel and regards to all of my friends and write soon to your affectionate

Brother

The handwriting is the same that appears in two letters Griffin had written to his mother a few months before from Cliffton Academy, but the writer signs himself not "G. S. M." or "G. S. Marshall" as in the earlier letters but "J. T. Wilkes." The "Morgan" he refers to can only be his brother John.

"I never understood," said my cousin Sarah when she handed me the worn sheet, "what a letter with that strange signature was doing in Mother's papers."

In Charlotte Court House it is asserted as fact that Fred Beal fired the shot that killed Jo Holmes, and evidence is cited to prove

[3] This was a simile my father often used.

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the assertion. Soon after the incident there arrived in the village a coffin purporting to contain the remains of Fred Beal. The device misfired—the coffin was opened and was found to contain wrapped rocks.

What happened to Fred Beal remains a mystery. The fate of David Morton, the fourth fugitive, is known. He wound up in Nebraska where he became first a cowboy, then an outlaw and a pal of Billy the Kid. The two had a falling out and became mortal enemies. The last sequence of Morton's life is recorded in *The Saga of Billy the Kid* by Walter Noble Burns. Morton is called Billy in the book, but there is convincing evidence, in a footnote, that he was the David Morton who left Virginia with my father. In the course of the Lincoln County cattle war, after a series of events too complicated to set down here, Morton and another outlaw Frank Baker became the prisoners of Billy the Kid. The Kid for the moment was on the side of the law—he had been deputized as a member of the posse that was sent out to capture Morton and Baker and bring them to Lincoln, the county seat. The posse did capture them, but the Kid had no intention of delivering his prisoners to the sheriff. As the party neared the town of Roswell, on the way to Lincoln, the Kid told Morton that he could write a letter. Morton did so, and when he handed it to Ash Upson, the postmaster at Roswell, he asked Upson to inform the person to whom it was addressed of "the full particulars of my death when you hear of them." In the footnote it is stated that the letter was addressed to Morton's cousin in Virginia, Judge H. H. Marshall, my grandfather. Soon after leaving Roswell, the posse and its prisoners turned off into a trail leading to a "spring pool" which was used as a waterhole for animals. The spring bore the beautiful name of Agua Negra, but its local name was Stinkin' Springs. Accounts agree, according to Mr. Burns, that the Kid killed Morton and Baker, though the exact circumstances are in dispute. A few days later sheepherders found their bodies beside the pool and buried them.

I once asked my father who killed Jo Holmes. He replied only that it was not he.

How long John and Griffin stayed at the Taylor place is not recorded. Eventually they went west from the Taylors' and, work-

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ing their way, finally arrived in San Francisco. They turned eastward again when they got jobs driving a six-mule team, hauling a load of freight over the Sierra Nevada Mountains to Elko, Nevada. That was in 1869, and Griffin earned his first money in Elko peddling newspapers on the trains of the recently completed transcontinental railway. He had another job in Elko, as a bartender in a saloon where shootings were so frequent that the bar was faced with a sheet of metal so that the bartenders, by ducking, could get out of the line of fire.

This interlude had a sequel many years later. My father, who became first a cattleman and then a sheepman, went to Chicago with a shipment of stock. In those days shippers from the West were greeted at the station by "gentlemen" with elegant carriages who offered to show the greenhorns the town and wound up by mulcting them of what might be a large part of their year's cash income. Father was approached by such a man, but this time it turned out that the fleecer and the prospective victim had already met. The gentleman with the carriage was the man who had owned the saloon in Elko. He showed Father the town, but the greenhorn went home with his stock money intact.

From Nevada the Wilkes brothers went north as cowhands with a cattle train bound for Montana. They decided to stay in Montana, and John did spend the rest of his life there. But Griffin soon moved on again—as the result of an incident that made him once more a fugitive from the law.

A man was killed. The local vigilantes were aroused and swore to find the culprit. The dead man was known to be a cattle rustler, and it seems odd that vigilantes would bother about the death of a cattle rustler, but perhaps, like those villains so often summoned up by the script writer for the The Lone Ranger, this was a cattle rustler who appeared to be something quite different and respectable. It may even be that the vigilantes were villains in league with the cattle rustler. The sheriff, who was a friend of the Wilkes brothers, apparently believed that the victim was a villain and had reason to think that the vigilantes were no better than they should be. On the other hand, a piece of evidence found at the scene of the crime implicated the Wilkes brothers; they were bound to be suspected, and, if apprehended, hanged. The sheriff made them a proposition. If one of them would light out, thereby drawing the

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blame upon himself, he, the sheriff, would try to give the fugitive a good start before he sent a posse after him. The young men accepted. Griffin was the one who lit out. The plan succeeded, and Griffin got away.

He rode south and a little east. Some time later a young fellow calling himself Jim Wilkes turned up in Raft River Valley. It was cattle country and Wilkes had no trouble getting a job as a cowhand with one of the outfits on the river. The year was 1870.

By the time Jim Wilkes met Kate Parke thirteen years later, he had acquired a stake of his own. With a partner he had a ranch and cattle near the town of Albion, fifteen miles northwest over the mountains from the ranch on Cassia Creek. But he still came to Raft River Valley. He had friends there and he liked to dance.

In Virginia, the "old fuss" had long since died out and Griffin was free to resume his own name long before he met Kate. But his relations with people in the Valley where he had turned up as a stranger in 1870 had been built around his identity as Jim Wilkes. In Raft River Valley the story of his early life as the son of a Virginia planter and judge would have sounded more like a tall tale than straight fact—or worse, like one of the current romances about southern gentlemen in the wild West. In any event, Griffin had got used to being Jim Wilkes. As for the secret life his disguise entailed, that, too, had become familiar.

Whatever the reasons, Griffin had preserved his disguise and his secret. Only in his letters home did he speak in his own name. Three from the 1880's were kept. They were addressed to his mother in Richmond where she and Grandfather now lived. Around 1870 Grandfather Marshall, who had always been more lawyer than planter, had left the plantation to be farmed by tenants and had entered a law partnership in Richmond.

The first letter, postmarked Albion, was written on Christmas Eve:

At home
12/24th/83

My Dear Mother

I thought for a long time that I would not write you but would surprise you by dropping in on you about the Xmas holidays, but I am afraid I cannot get away. In the first place I am short of funds, in the next place I have a partner that drinks very hard and if I

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should leave home for a month or two everything would be neglected, besides he would get so deeply in debt, that it would compel me to sacrifice property to settle. I was never so worried in my life. There are certain parties that fill him up with liquor, and handle him as they please. In spite of all I can do he squanders from eight hundred to a thousand dollars a year for whiskey alone. His nephew has been here since the first of June, he has become perfectly disgusted and will leave tomorrow. I think now that we will divide the cattle in the spring for I will not stand it.

I have heard nothing from the lawyers since they advised me of the receipt of the papers Pa sent them. I do not suppose Pa would care to see me anyway, he never writes or seems to take the least interest in me whatever, but it is his pleasure to treat me so, and I have no complaints to make. I would make every possible effort to go home but I do not feel that I would be particularly welcome so do not try very hard; I may, however, make you a short visit before the winter is over for I would like to see Sister and your dear self; more than anyone living. I am doing very well, have a good start in the world and with anything like average luck will have a good stake inside of five years, that is, will be worth probably $25,000. We have had a splendid fall and this month here has been fine weather. There is about three inches of snow at present, but it is a benefit. Cattle eat snow and do not have to go so far for water.

I will write sister soon. My Xmas will be a very dull one. Times are hard and money very scarce. To add to it all I have the blues; I know I am alone in the world and the older I get the more I feel it; if a man has no property in this country he is shunned by all that know him, but if he has money he is considered a pretty good fellow.

Wishing you a Merry Xmas and a happy New Year, I am

Your affectionate son

G. S. M.

Griffin's remark about lawyers and papers has to do with the death of his brother John. Through the years, John had done well. He had acquired a ranch of his own on Birch Creek, in Montana. Like Griffin, he had not married, but he had a housekeeper who, with her two small girls, lived in the ranch house. One evening a tramp passing through the country asked for food and a bed and was told he could sleep in the barn. In the middle of the night, the tramp entered the house. The noise he made woke Uncle John, whose bedroom was on the ground floor. He went out to investigate the disturbance, and was shot by the intruder. The housekeeper, wakened by the shot, ran downstairs from her room on the second floor, and she, too, was shot. The tramp then set fire to the house.

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The housekeeper, though she was wounded, was able to get out, and she saved her children by persuading them to jump from the second-story window, but Uncle John was either killed by the tramp or too badly wounded to make his escape. The tramp was caught. Mother loved to tell the story. And in one of her letters, she wrote, "They took him to a store. They led the two girls through the store and they both pointed out this man. A vigilance commity was raised. They hung the man to a telephone pole or something like that." Mother wouldn't have known or cared what the word "anachronism" meant.

This was the way I heard the story when I was a child. But in the family papers I got from Virginia, there is evidence, in letters written in 1890 by Grandfather Marshall and my father, that Uncle John's death may have been plotted by a man or by men whose motive was robbery of a different sort, that the tramp may not have been a tramp but the tool of a rival in search of documents. It is one of those stories that cannot be verified, except for the detail that Uncle John was indeed killed.

Before the next letter to Richmond was written, Kate Parke and Jim Wilkes had met and become engaged, secretly. But the secret could not be kept, and when it leaked out, Charlie Parke raised hell. He said that Wilkes was "too damned old." But that was the least of his objections. Nobody knew, he said, who Wilkes was or where he had come from. Some people doubted that Wilkes was his real name. It was even rumored that he had killed a man and had come to Raft River to hide out. And if he didn't have something to hide, why was he so close-mouthed about himself? No daughter of his, yelled Charlie Parke, would ever marry a man "old enough to be her father" and, for all anybody knew, a murderer besides. Grandmother had an objection, too. Wilkes was not a Mormon. Grandfather probably threw that in for good measure. Whether or not he snorted at Wilkes's high-toned bearing I hadn't the sense to inquire when I might have got an answer, but I could not be more sure that Jim Wilkes's Virginia manners confirmed Charlie Parke's worst suspicions.

Grandfather forbade Wilkes the ranch. He forbade Kate to leave it. The battle was drawn. But Kate's mind was made up and she had ways of outwitting Charlie Parke. When a dance and a meet-

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ing with Wilkes were at stake, she pretended to go to bed early, then slipped out later when the house was still, caught and saddled one of the horses—which her father turned out every evening into the pasture the better to defeat her schemes—and made her escape. She told us she sometimes rode as far as fifteen miles through the dark valley to meet Jim Wilkes and dance till dawn. She knew she'd get a licking when she got home, but lickings were something she was used to. And when her father resorted to a practical joke as a method of punishment, Kate had the last laugh. One night, having discovered her absence, Charlie Parke, out of some wild logic, went to the trouble of bringing in the pet deer Dote and tying him to Kate's bedstead; but it was daylight when Kate got home, and Dote by that time had torn the bedclothes to pieces to get at the straw in the ticking.

Threats, blows, a deer in the bedroom—none of them worked. Meanwhile, Griffin had told Kate his real name and his history. And in the end, Grandfather consented to let Kate marry Jim Wilkes on condition that he produce proof of the story he had told the girl about his family and his past.

It was at this point that Griffin wrote to his mother the second of the three letters that were saved. This letter is also postmarked Albion.

"Hardscrabble"
2d/10th/1884

My Dear Mother

Your most welcome letter of the 9th was received several days ago. Glad to know you are well and comfortable.

The weather has been very cold here for the last week or more, and the snow is coming down tonight. Our stock have wintered splendid so far; but it is a long time yet until spring and green grass. We do not have any green grass to speak of until about the 10th of April, and if we should have a very severe March we will lose more or less cattle.

You will get a letter from a *young lady,* making some inquiries about me, about the time this reaches you or very soon thereafter. Please answer any and all questions, correctly, do not keep anything back. I have already told her everything and told her to write you; and gave her your address—please write her a nice sweet letter.

She has never had the opportunity of acquiring an education, but she is *good,* and thinks lots of me—so I hope you will look over any mistakes made—say nothing to Father about it. He is not much interested in me; answer her letter and say nothing about it to anyone—do not be afraid. I trust her.

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I wrote sister not long since—I would like to have sent her a nice Xmas present but I never was as hard run for money in my life—I have heard nothing from the Montana business . . . Am expecting to get word every day.

My love to all. Howdo to Aunt Mary and Randolph.

From your affectionate son,
G. S. M.

Kate's letter to Griffin's mother was not kept. Neither was Grandmother Marshall's reply. But her answers to Kate's questions were apparently satisfactory, for Kate and Griffin were married on December 29, 1884—not in Raft River Valley but at the home of Kate's Grandmother Watterson in Logan, Utah. The last of the three letters from Griffin to his mother reports his marriage; it also refers to the death in a railway accident of Griffin's younger brother Charles.

Ogden, Utah
Dec. 31st, 1884

My Dear Mother

You must not think strange of my not having written you since Mr. Gaines [his sister's husband] & father advised me of poor Charley's sad ending. It was a terrible blow. I can hardly realize that it can be so. But it does no good to talk of it now, it only makes it the sadder.

I do not suppose it will surprise you much, when I tell you I am married, was married the evening of the 29th. Will stop here two or three days, & then go on home. I would have liked so much to have made you all a visit this winter, but it is out of the question. I do not think I will live in this country very much longer. I was married by my own name; I was one hundred & fifty miles from home, & outside of my wife's parents, it will not be known for some time. I shall get my business straightened up so that I can resume my own name any and every where. I have a partner, papers are drawn between us; we will divide in the spring. I will have to keep quiet about it until then. You can therefore address your letters to me as usual.

My wife joins me in love to you. You have had a sad blow, my dear Mother, but try to be as cheerful as possible.

With best love to all I am as ever

your affectionate
Son G. S. Marshall

The first child of Kate and Griffin was born on April 1, 1886. He was named Hunter Holmes Marshall, after his grandfather.

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Just when my father resumed his own name "any and every where" I do not know. One story has it that he was forced to do so before he planned to. He ran for sheriff of Cassia County, which had been created in 1879 with Albion as its seat. His rival got wind of the fact that Wilkes was not Wilkes and made an issue of the deception. Whereupon Griffin admitted that his name was not J. T. Wilkes but G. S. Marshall, took the offensive, and made such a good case for himself that he won the election. It is a good story. Whether or not it is true I have not been able to find out. My father was elected sheriff of Cassia County in November, 1888, for a two-year term.

Being sheriff of Cassia County, Idaho, in the late 1880's was hazardous. The country was wild and sparsely inhabited. Every man carried a gun as a matter of course. One of the stories my father told a brother who, years later, told it to me, was about a dangerous outlaw who was married to the daughter of a rancher in Cassia County. Some time before my father's accession, the outlaw came back from wherever he was hiding out to pay her a visit. A reward had been posted for him. His father-in-law decided to turn him in and sent word to the sheriff to come and get him. Meanwhile he kept his son-in-law within firing range. When the prisoner asked to go to the privy one day, his father-in-law conducted him there and waited outside with his gun trained on the door. The outlaw, as he came out, leaned down as if to adjust his overalls, whipped out a gun he had concealed in his boot, and killed his father-in-law. He lit out and disappeared. Time passed. Then word came to the new sheriff, my father, that the outlaw was heading back toward Cassia County (he must have been genuinely fond of that wife of his). And what did my father do? I'm afraid his behavior would hardly suit the uses of Hollywood. Instead of waiting for the outlaw to turn up and preparing a hot welcome for him, at high noon, Sheriff Marshall got on his horse and rode for two days "clear into the Salmon River country" where the outlaw was reported to be. The sheriff found his man—and persuaded him not to return to Cassia County.

I was nettled when I heard this story, but the brother who told it to me argued that in a period when violence was rampant our father had only played the part of common sense in keeping the outlaw, and more violence, out of his territory.

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In addition to being sheriff, my father had his own cattle, of course, and he also worked for a big cattle company. My brother said that he was connected for a considerable time at least with Miller and Lux, one of the biggest of the cattle companies, and that the territory for which he was responsible extended from the Canadian border to Mexico. This last sounds as if exaggeration had entered in. I do have letters, however—they found their way into the Virginia archive—that show that in 1890 my father was working for J. G. Baker and Company and that its affairs did take him to Canada.

Out of these letters rises a picture of my father traveling through Montana—his brother John's country—on his way to Fort MacLeod in North West Territory to sell a herd of cattle that had been driven there earlier for fattening. And they reveal other things as well.

The first letter from Griffin to Kate was mailed from Cartersville, Montana. It is written on the stationery of J. G. Baker and Company.

May 12th, 1890

My Dear Wife

I got here yesterday and will start out for St. Mary's River this afternoon. Stewart was not at Pocatello, had to wait for him until Saturday morning. We found our team here and everything in good shape. From what we know everything is all right North, and think we can sell without any trouble for about $25 per head. You can write me as soon as you get this to Lees Creek, Alberta, N. W. T. I will write you again at Choteau and again the first opportunity after getting to St. Mary's. I hope the children are well. Kiss them for papa.

Nothing more now. I wrote Sister from Pocatello. Do not put any extra Stamps on your letter, one will do.

Your affectionate
husband
G. S. Marshall

The second letter was written from Birch Creek, Montana.

May 17th '90

My Dear Wife

I wrote you from Wolf Creek, but will write again. We are getting along as well as possible; we are now in the country where John used to live, crossed the creek yesterday where he lived and was killed. I met quite a number of his old friends. The outfit that

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got away with his property are about broke, it done them no good. Everyone says it serves them right. We think we will get to camp on St. Mary's by Monday night. We heard through a man yesterday right from there that there was a party wanting to buy the cattle and were waiting for us to get there. Write me at Lees Creek and tell me if anything is going on in the Sheriff's Office and how things are. Did Joe Smith get the stallion from California, from Rutherford? If not what did he do? Tell me if they have gone to working cattle over about Dry Creek. I do not think I will have to stay where the cattle are more than a week. I understand they are pretty much all gathered and in fine condition.

With a kiss for your dear self and the babies I am as ever

Yours affectionately
G. S. Marshall

The third and fourth letters were written from Fort MacLeod, N. W. T.

May 25, 1890

My Dear Wife

I came in here yesterday morning early, horse races here, the Queen's birthday, everybody from the surrounding country were in. We cannot tell right now just what we can do with the cattle, we can sell the steers and dry cows at a big price, say nothing about the price, two-year old steers and dry cows for $30 per head, 3's steers $40, 4's and up $45; but we want to try and sell them all in a lump. The cattle are big for now, this is by far the finest grass country I every saw in my life.

I hope everything is running smooth at home. It will only take us three or four days to gather the cattle when we sell; and I will try and go by Va on leaving here. Write me Lees Creek via Lethbridge, Alberta, N. W. T.

I do not think I will be gone more than a week over time, but you look for me any time after the 7th of June. If you need any money and can see Jim Pierce get it from him. Kiss my boys for me and a kiss for your dear self. I am as ever yours affectionately

G. S. Marshall

June 4, 1890

My Dear Wife

We have finally made a sale of the cattle $25 per head round and just as soon as they can be got together and delivered will start home. I will be so much over time that I will not dare to go home (East). The Commissioners would surely kick. I do not think it will take us over a week or ten days at the outside to get through.

Have the patch of alfalfa watered and get Asel to water the pasture if he has not done so already. I think I will certainly be

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home by the 17th of June. I am in a great hurry so will say good-bye. Kiss the babys for me, and a kiss for yourself.

Your affectionate husband
G. S. Marshall

These four letters came to me from Virginia enclosed in a letter written by Grandfather Marshall to his daughter Mary. Grandmother Marshall had died in 1887. Grandfather's law practice kept him in Richmond most of the time, but he went as often as he could to Roxabel where Aunt Mary, whose husband had died in 1886, now lived with her four children. Grandfather had apparently heard from her of Griffin's trip through Montana, and his letter expresses a love and concern for Griffin that accords not at all with my father's contention that his father did not care for him. It is written on the stationery of the Westmoreland Club[4] in Richmond.

30 Jun. '90

My Dear Mary

I returned from Chicago Saturday morning—I was so uneasy about G that I hurried back, having left this city on Monday night. I reached Chicago on Wednesday morning, staid there till Thursday night and leaving then reached here Saturday morning—had a hard time, encountering heat that was overpowering, . . . As soon as I returned I saw Miss Lily who told me of the telegram and how she had sent it to you—and relieved my mind from the weight of anxiety which was crushing. While I tried to write encouragingly to you I was uneasy because G. had been in that country where his brother had been murdered and although he had left it I imagined that he might have been followed by some of those wretches and himself murdered. As it is—*He is all safe,* thank God. I wrote to his wife the moment I rec'd your letter enclosing hers—and yesterday rec'd an envelope addressed to her undoubtedly in his handwriting enclosing sundry letters and a telegram from Griffin—but not a line or memo from her. . . . I am very sorry that we will not see G. now—I hope he will come next year at any rate, if not sooner. . . .

God bless the little children. Tell them I hope soon to get up there to see them.

In haste most aff'ly your
devoted father
H. H. M.

Kate and Marshall, as they always called each other, spent the first eleven years of their married life on the ranch near Albion. Five of their "babys," all boys, were born there. After Hunter

[4] I'm told that the Westmoreland Club was so exclusive it finally went out of existence.

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Holmes came Griffin Harris, Charles Parke, Wilmer Stith, and Joseph Lamoni. Charles died in infancy; Lamoni had spinal meningitis in his first year, and never fully recovered. In spite of these sorrows, the years in Albion, so far as I can make out, were relatively happy. Yet there was no trace in the family memory of any affection for Albion. My father never spoke of it. My mother referred to it as "that hole."

The town of Albion is fifteen miles over a low divide from Cassia Creek. Low on the Raft River Valley side, that is; the valley in whose pit Albion lies is smaller and deeper, the mountains that ring it are higher. It is a bowl, while Raft River Valley is a saucer. Albion was just as remote as Raft River Valley from civilization, the civilization of the Mormon communities in Utah. But it was a town as well as a cowtown; as the seat of the county it was a growing point of settlement, and in 1893 a state normal school was established there.

Mother said she hated Albion because it was low and because she always felt shut in there. She called it not only "that hole" but "that mudhole"—in the spring the mud in Albion was assuredly thick and deep. And there is no question that the words and phrases she used in talking about it—"low," "shut in," "mud," "that hole"—were for her set against the cluster of words that were associated in her feelings with Raft River Valley—"high," "open," "dry," "wide."

As for my father, he had never become committed to any part of the region where he had been set down by chance in 1870. Even in the letter he wrote to Mother from Fort MacLeod, Virginia is "home," though he inserts "East" in parenthesis as an afterthought. Thousands of miles of space and a quarter-century of time had not weakened the cable of affection that bound him to his early life. His mother had died, but his older sister, who was like a second mother, still lived, and she lived at Roxabel.

Since his departure from Virginia, my father had lived the strenuous life, first of a newcomer making his way in a new country without funds and without friends, and then of a man of affairs. Certainly his preoccupation with Virginia was not born of frustration in the ordinary sense. He had prospered and had come to terms with the world he lived in. He had credit at the bank, and his politics were those of the cattleman—high-tariff Republican.

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Nor was he unhappy in his personal life. He had married, he loved his wife, and they had founded a family whose future was his passionate concern. He had made for himself a life designed to discourage rather than intensify a preoccupation with the past; this life, moreover, had been built in a period of change so vast that to a man as sensible as he was in practical affairs any return to Virginia was unthinkable and in a region where the past had no standing. Yet the image of Roxabel not only remained central in my father's heart and mind; it was transformed into his vision of the good life. The power of this vision became greater as the years passed and reached its apotheosis in my early childhood.

Why?

I think the image remained central and inviolate because it was preserved, against all chances and changes, in a substance as intangible and as indestructible as light—a love for his mother that never became quite adult. A boyish longing pervades his letters to his mother and his sister. His complaints about his father, whom he regarded with both awe and resentment, are likewise those of a boy. Through the years, though he had become a man in practical matters, his boy's feeling toward his parents had not altered—as if they had been fixed by exile and intensified by secrecy long drawn out. Moreover, he had remained an exile. He never accepted the West; he never, in one fastness of his being, accepted his growing up.

In such longings and refusals, visions find their rise.

I speak from objective evidence, but I speak even more confidently out of my own experience. The nature of my father's love for his mother and his sense of being an exile—these became, very early, elements in my own inner life that yielded both pleasure and pain. They played a decisive and at times a destructive part in the lives of his other children and of his wife, my mother.

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R. G. VLIET

# Salvos for Albertito

*for Albert Cross Hicks*

They are burning the sugarcane.
The flames leap up like firestorms
on the sun, thunder of shook
sheets, the black smoke
boiling, whole campos blazing
and overshadowed. Four pairs
of tire-soled huaraches scrape
the road, flowers follow, the coffin
drifts on human shoulders
through the air. Tizne, black snow,
delicate carbonized fragments
of leaves, settles onto the long
blue box, onto our hair. They
have tied up the jaws of Albertito,
a kerchief binds his hands.
Nothing
will sing now in the capillaries.
His poor, slack legs, one foot
akilter, gauze in his mouth,
an eye part closed: he will rise
like dough. He will rise
in his gauze crown and seer
sucker coat.
The bells toll.

Secret blood sprang in the night
between four candles,
an afterflow.

You who could hardly
stand pain, who said, "I would confess
under torture immediately," lay

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two endless days, two endless
nights in an agony of flesh,
a siphon in your side, no plans
or codes to offer to governments
or God, your wrecked body
stumbling under its load
like a starved, beaten burro.
"Oh such fire!" and yet were patient
and gentle, laughed sometimes.
You climbed,
considerate to us who trailed
behind, and when the eyes went blind,
you worked as wilfully and naturally
as a man with scythe or flail
alone in a field under the hot
sun, hurrying the seizures
until the blood broke.
Comb
the hair; gather up the hands.
I dry the sweat from your face,
my friend, my kind, my human
self.
The blue boat drifts
through the air, through the black snow.

Jacaranda. Bougainvillaea.
Your hand above the chessboard;
the clatter of your typewriter, a box
of crackers close beside; evenings
on the pórtico: a kiss from Tana:
the creak of your wicker chair.
Flor de oro. Tulipán.

I brush an ash from my sleeve.

The familiar face, the motionless
familiar hands
below.

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*The Salvos*

Sunlight on hands, on Tana's
face.

Fat raindrops
puncture the dust.

Here comes
the little blood angel,
mosquito, singing.

Night,
day's shadow: a wind rises
and mangos drop.

Thick
horse lips: the white horse
strips leaves from the guamuchil branch.

Bougainvillaea, flowers like sex,
like scarlet tongues.

Voices
in doorways, in a room.

The dog
running celebrates its bones.

Brown moth, quick flakes
between leaves.

Male flesh
and female flesh, the slick
juncture hopeful and sweet.

Under an iron, smell of hot cloth.

The pavement darkens: rain
releases ozone.

Mornings
the eyelid lifts to light,
to birdnoise bubbling in the trees.

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*

Black grain is poured in a tube,
brown twisted paper, tied
to a reed: the reeds whistle,
rise: in the sky above your grave
explosions salute.

The cane will be crushed soon,
sweetness out of bone.

# Lake Zempoala

They are not happy that the people have come.
They trot up the creek and out onto the flat,
stepping on their shadows, black manes
and burnt umber, fat on mountain grass.

The red bus from the Colegio Guadalupe
commands the meadow. The people stand
in a ring, playing kickball. It is true
an Indian who sells bottled drinks
wanders up the canyon to spread
a burlap with white corn upon it.
In this way he is able to lay
a rope across the necks of two old mares
and lead them down to the children and nuns.

In the evening the people leave, their only message
paper plates and tin cans. Clouds catch
in the pine trees. The horses come down
onto the meadow. They step into the silence; their hoofs
make no louder a sound than a pine cone
dropping does, or first raindrops
on dust, as they mouth the dampening grass.

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# Oneonta, New York

The scraped sidewalks, the glazed
hardened snow. Someone
has flung a dime into the sky.
The college girls hurry
to classes, their skin smoking
inside their slips, dresses, sweaters,
coats. Cold tears
are at the edges of our eyes; our hair
crackles with electric cold.
The naked elms' with iron
torsos roots go under
the sidewalks—how can they live
in those vaults? Our hands are deep
in the bear caves of our pockets.
They think of straw and dry
leaves. Our cheeks are rigid;
to move our jaws might make
them crack. We could be crushed
so easily by stone buildings.
To go into hot rooms
where there is coffee is not to go
into a true world. Our lenses
mist. We are strange
without our constricted hearts,
our overcoats. Here outside, the frame
houses are like viking boats
caught in the floes, their lapstrakes
sheeted with ice. Our blood
huddles in our stomachs. Our thin
shadows die at four
o'clock. Right now I am in Mexico:
the sun
hammers and brightens the leaves,
kindles the bituminous black
feathers of the ani, fattens
the mangos, heats them to the seed.

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RAYNER HEPPENSTALL

# The Tables Speak

In December 1851, Victor Hugo, after actively opposing the *coup d'état* by which Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte seized power in France, was smuggled into Belgium disguised as a workman. The following summer, he went to Jersey and took a house in Marine Parade, St. Helier. Life there must have been rather boring, and the group of French exiles took up table-turning. Their sessions lasted from September 1853 until May 1855, with a final session that July. A member of the Hugo family tells me that there is more yet to come, but we already have detailed records of almost a hundred sessions. For most of them, times of starting and ending are given. There are short and interrupted sessions, at some of which only fragments of nonsense were received, but a fair number went on for five hours or more, generally starting at about nine o'clock in the evening and going on into the small hours, but sometimes from half past one or two o'clock in the afternoon until seven. There are seven-hour sessions recorded, and one of eight. By my calculation, at least three hundred hours were spent in session, and the amount of material we have totals some thirty thousand words, much of it in verse.

The "medium" was Hugo's son Charles, a curious figure, not without talent himself but lethargic. Two years before, he had appeared before the Court of Assize and been imprisoned for an article against capital punishment in *L'Événement,* a paper which he co-edited with Auguste Vacquerie, another of the group, a minor playwright. Vacquerie was the principal scribe, but Hugo himself wrote down some of the proceedings, and one or two others took a hand. The game was started by Mme. de Girardin, a distinguished visitor from Paris, where table-turning was all the rage that year. The apparatus and code she devised were simple but not time-saving. A small, three-footed pedestal table was stood on top of the large family table, about which everyone sat. The best results were produced by Charles, but Mme. Hugo and others took their turn *at* the table, *i.e.,* standing with fingers on the surface of the *guéridon* (this no doubt accounted for some

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of Charles's tiredness, unless perhaps he were found a tall stool). The spirits dictated their messages by causing the little table to rock, each letter of the alphabet requiring a certain number of knocks, one for *A*, two for *B* and so on up to twenty-six for *Z*. No doubt with practice the routine speeded up, and there'd be some degree of shorthand. I don't suppose, for instance, that the definite article or auxiliary verbs were commonly spelt out. One sharp knock for a "*yes*" and two for a "*no*" was a convention established at the outset. Numbers would be given by measured raps.

The first session took place on Sunday, September 11, 1853, in the evening after dinner. Mme. de Girardin summoned up the daughter or sister of one of those present, several of whom were more or less recently bereaved, not least the Hugos. And so there were tears and so on at the first session, but after that the usual summoning of nearest and dearest was left to the occasional stranger. Here I'd better say that I an not a spiritualist. Perhaps I'd better say also that I regard Victor Hugo as rather more than the greatest French poet of the nineteenth century, *hélas* or not (I refer, of course, to a famous remark by André Gide), so that I intend no mere facetiousness. I have played these games, like anybody else. I know that odd things happen. I'd settle for some kind of explanation in terms of what has been called extra-sensory perception, telepathy, as we might say (if it weren't a contradiction in terms), at close quarters, with all those present contributing but especially Hugo and his father-eclipsed elder son, the latter battling obscurely against the suggestions of his father's mind. For sometimes the results are so much in the manner of Victor Hugo that it is difficult not to regard much of what was transmitted as part of his collected works, voluminous as these already are. But then he was a human dynamo on no mean scale.

Among the spirits who presented themselves, a fair number were those of historical figures, among the earliest Chateaubriand, Dante and Racine. But there were also abstractions, and one of the most important of these was Drama, who first appeared at the fourth session, on September 14, in the afternoon. Replaced by Joan of Arc and then, very briefly, by Jesus Christ, Drama returned at the fifth and sixth sessions. Dialogue of this kind is recorded:

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VACQUERIE. Name the great dramatic poets.
DRAMA. God.
VACQUERIE. Are there any others?
DRAMA. Job, Tyrtaeus, Aesop, Cervantes, Dante, Rabelais, Nero. . . .
HUGO. You regard Nero as a great dramatic poet?
DRAMA. Yes.
HUGO. Why?
DRAMA. He burned Rome.
HUGO. Well . . .?
DRAMA. And sang. Orpheus, Milton. . . .
VACQUERIE. Victor Hugo?
DRAMA. Yes. But take away the footlights. They'll see the work better.
HUGO. Why don't you like footlights?
DRAMA. The ideal is not that of a lighting engineer.

The next French historical figures were Marat, Charlotte Corday, Robespierre and the great Napoleon. Among those who'd learnt French for the occasion were Moses, Aristotle, Socrates and Hannibal. This last did in fact also speak a little Carthaginian, from which he said the Basque language derived. Also from revolutionary times, André Chénier completed a number of his unfinished poems, producing in all more than a hundred lines, interesting as *pastiche*. In December, the Greek poet Tyrtaeus dictated a poem of twenty-six lines (in French). On January 2, 1854, Chénier returned and, in prose, lengthily described his sensations on being guillotined. On January 6, he dictated fourteen more lines of verse. Then there was a pause:

VACQUERIE. Is something worrying you? *(Pause.)*
HUGO. Are you still there, Chénier?
*(Two knocks.)*
VACQUERIE. Who is it saying, *No?*
SPIRIT. Androcles's lion.
HUGO. Speak.
LION. The hair upon the loftiest brow is a mane. The lion is the poet of solitude. The lion is up before the sun rises. The lion forgives, the lion dreams. The lion is the roaring of the wind and the silence of the desert. My mane stands up and is used as a lyre by the hurricane. My tail whips the air. My claws are strength, my gaze is kindness. My jaws pull back the tiger in the wilderness and restore children to their mother. The lion reigns over the tiger. In the circus arena, it grants the favour Nero refuses, it spares Androcles, it saves Daniel, it abates its wrath like God, and it kisses the foot of the Idea. The lion is that power which makes man great and the mercy which makes man good. I am that lion. Salute me.

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THOSE PRESENT. We salute you. Hail.
VACQUERIE. Shall we hear from you again?
LION. Yes.
VACQUERIE. When?
LION. Tuesday, at nine o'clock.
HUGO. Tell André Chénier that we beg him to come back soon and go on with his poem. You can bring us his reply on Tuesday.

A very spooky session on January 6, with wind howling round the house and dogs barking, seems to have been due to a visitor joining Charles "at the table." After his departure, Shakespeare first appeared on the 13th. He spoke of other great writers in the afterworld and promised to reappear on the 23rd. He was two days late, as it happened, but reappeared a number of times, alternating with Aeschylus, Martin Luther and a spirit known as the Shadow of the Tomb. In the course of these early visits, Shakespeare dictated a poem of two hundred and fifty lines, very much in the manner of Victor Hugo. Rather unforgivably, he also came out with the statement that the English language was inferior to French. By February 10, Molière and Aeschylus are disputing the forefront. At this time, almost everything is in verse, and Androcles's lion has been forgotten. Androcles's lion doesn't like this. On Friday, February 17, at about eleven o'clock in the evening, the Shadow of the Tomb has just completed a stanza about tears, the sea and Heaven. The knocking stopped. It started again briskly and spelled out: "Hello, fools!"

VACQUERIE. This isn't the Shadow of the Tomb.
CHARLES. Who are you?
SPIRIT. Androcles's lion.
VACQUERIE. Have you some communication to make, apart from this friendly greeting?
LION. Interrogate me in verse, the way you do with Aeschylus and Molière.
MME. HUGO. If we'd expected you, we should have had something ready, but the lines we could improvise now would hardly be worthy of you.
LION. This kick makes asses of you. Farewell.
*(Silence.)*
VACQUERIE. Well, there's no kick. What does he mean?
HUGO. Perhaps he thought my wife's excuse a refusal and therefore insulting.

Molière, Aeschylus and the Shadow of the Tomb continue. On March 23, Androcles's lion appeared briefly masquerading

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as a White Lady whom local people say they have seen around the house. Next day, he, the lion, began to dictate a long poem in six-line stanzas, an excellent poem, which it was to take eight further sessions to complete. It begins in the mood of what we've already heard, the lion at daybreak going to meet the sun, the two rejoicing in each other's company. There were thirty-six lines that evening, thirty-six a week later. Five days after that, on April 4, at nine o'clock:

MME. HUGO. Who's there?
SPIRIT. Legurru.
VACQUERIE. Is that your name?
SPIRIT. Yes.
MME. HUGO. Who are you?
SPIRIT. Fohe.

*(Mme. Hugo was at the table. Charles replaces her.)*

HUGO. Did you really mean to say "Legurru Fohe"?
SPIRIT. Yes.
HUGO. Were you speaking French?
SPIRIT. No.
HUGO. What language were you speaking?
SPIRIT. Animal language.
HUGO. What animal?
SPIRIT. Lions.

No verse that evening, but a drawing lesson with a *planchette* and talk of a comet which has been seen. On Monday, the lion introduced itself simply as *Ego* and dictated three lines. Three days later, it gave itself various names in lion language and then said it was bothered by the moon shining through the window. On Friday, calling itself *Vir inter animalia,* it dictated thirty-six lines deploring the behaviour of other lions in the amphitheatre. The following afternoon, the Sea dictated music to a visitor, Maurice Guérin, in a code determined by him. Next day, he played it on his flute, and it made no sense, but the Sea spoke. In the early evening, Drama appeared and announced that Shakespeare had finished a new two-act play. This would be dictated in the morning, beginning on the 27th of April, five days later. Betweenwhiles, the lion dictated one stanza on a new theme, itself at midnight and the sleeping flowers.

Il est minuit, c'est l'heure immense et solennelle
Où j'ouvre devant Dieu ma splendide prunelle,

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C'est l'heure de l'amour,
Où sous les cieux cléments, sombres et taciturnes,
Les fleurs dans les forêts, ces coquettes nocturnes,
S'embaument pour le jour.

This is the most direct evidence we get of extra-sensory perception as commonly understood. With Charles and a visitor at the table and Auguste Vacquerie taking it down, the stanza contains, in flowers as *coquettes nocturnes,* a distinct echo of what Victor Hugo was writing at the time, unknown to the others.

But now we come to the play, the *pièce de résistance* in this two-year banquet. Not only had Shakespeare learnt French in the Elysian Fields, he had also followed the course of French history. The action takes place late in the reign of Louis XV. The dialogue is not at all like Shakespeare. On the other hand, it isn't much like Victor Hugo either (unless it's the Hugo of *Mille Francs de Récompense,* a highly experimental play of uncertain date which has been performed in France in recent years, at Mulhouse I seem to remember). As the spirit of Drama advised earlier, the footlights have been taken away. The play opens with a wager between Heaven and Hell. Hell himself shall be pardoned if he can turn the most evil of men into a good man. The two figures greet each other familiarly, but speak out of two stars in the sky which are suddenly enlarged and brought close, "as if the spectators' opera glasses had been changed into magic telescopes." This prologue ends with a device familiar enough on radio and in other media unknown to Hugo. The voices of Heaven and Hell "have not stopped speaking, but, like those of two people in conversation walking away, no longer reach the audience." In other words, FADE OUT.

With this, the stars pale, and the sun takes their place. A village on the outskirts of Versailles. An inn, a cottage decorated with flowers, a church. Enter two men, cloaked, with swords, gold-braided hats, powdered hair. It is early on a summer evening:

FIRST MAN. You're sure she's worth seeing in bed? You haven't disturbed me for nothing?
SECOND MAN. She is charming, Sire.
FIRST MAN. How old?
SECOND MAN. The age at which birds leave the nest and girls make theirs. A little springtime all pink, a pretty morning all white.

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FIRST MAN. How old?
SECOND MAN. Fifteen.
FIRST MAN. That is not young. The age of love is eternally the same. Fifteen! Why fifteen? Decidedly, the fool who made the wicked hadn't much imagination. I want to gather flowers in bud and fruits in the seed. I am thirsty for human sap, I'd like to drain off a big glass of virginity at one draught, and get drunk on true innocence.
SECOND MAN. I hear the wedding music.
FIRST MAN. What wedding?
SECOND MAN. That of your pretty one, Sire.
FIRST MAN. Ah, that will add a bit of savour; I shall have two young hearts to break. Bride and bridegroom in a single bumper. To drink a virgin, life's intoxication; to drink a promised bride, death's. I hunger and thirst for life like a famished tomb.
SECOND MAN. They're coming. Let us go in here.

*(They disappear into the inn. Enter peasants singing and dancing joyously, in their Sunday best. Bagpipe. The youngest of the men goes to the door of the house on the left and knocks, while the others form a circle before the threshold.)*

JEROME, *calling.* Nihila! Nihila!
NIHILA, *opening the door.* Here I am.

There is folksong-like rhyming dialogue sung to the dance. As twilight falls, the lovers are left alone. Nihila (a sort of feminine, one supposes, of the Latin for nothing) is an orphan. They talk of the life they plan. They exchange promises and gifts. Jerome gives Nihila a little gold cross to wear, she gives him a silver ring and forces it on to his big, work-coarsened finger. It is all very touching and rather ordinary. They kneel, and Nihila prays. Out of the deepening gloom appear attendants of the King, who bind and gag the two and take them away. The sound of a coach is heard receding.

The scene changes to a sumptuous room. Boule furniture. Mirrors, flower-stands, pictures, sofas. A bed in an alcove. Much gilding. The ceiling depicts angels and clouds. Over the fireplace, a Jupiter and Leda group. Candelabra lighted. A rococo clock. The room is otherwise empty. I translate the scene only in outline:

THE CLOCK. Midnight.

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THE ALCOVE. My hour.
A LILY. Alas!
CLOCK. Is the King coming to-night?
ALCOVE. Yes.
A ROSEBUD. He is old to be loving.
ALCOVE. What time is it in the life of Louis XV?
CLOCK. A quarter to death.
ROSEBUD. When will that be?
CLOCK. Three years from now.
TORCHES. Three years still to light up this den of evil.

*(Enter lackeys, who place Nihila in a faint on the bed, then withdraw.)*

NIHILLA, *waking*. O God, where is Jerome? What have they done with him? How beautiful it is here! I'm afraid; how did I come to be here? There are no doors, there are no windows! Yet I must somehow escape from this place.
A WALL. Open, door, let her pass through.
THE DOOR. I am not the key.
WALL. Key, turn, open for this poor child.
KEY. I am not the hand.
WALL. Poor child, we cannot help you. We are men's instruments. We feel but cannot act.
KEY. I turn.
DOOR. I open.
LILY. I close.

*(Enter King. Ravaged face. Dazzling costume. He is already a bent old man, blue ribbon, cross of St. Louis.)*

KING. Well, my child, how do you like this room? Is it to your taste? Everything that is here belongs to you. I am your prisoner.
NIHILA. What have you done with my husband?
KING. To-night, if you please, I shall be taking his place.
NIHILA. Who are you?
KING. I am riches, I am power. My name is Happiness. I am called Nihila's smile. I am Nihila's good fortune.
NIHILA. Tell me your name, that I may tell it to God.
KING. We're not concerned with God. Kiss me, that's all.
NIHILA. Never!
KING. I can't wait so long. Come! a kiss—or I call my servants.
NIHILA. Ah! you're the king of France.

*(The candles gutter. Stifled cries.)*

There is no indication of the lapse of time, but we may suppose it to be three years. The scene changes to the vaults below the abbey of St. Denis. The tombs of the kings of France recede into the darkness. In the foreground, the tomb of the king newly buried.

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BONES. We were the strong arms of a France invaded.
I was the mace, and you, you were the sword.
We bore her banners.
We were the false weight on the human scales,
And tilted God himself to the side of hatred.
WORMS. You were only bones.
BONES. I am Tolbiac, I, and you were Pavia.
I am the death of a people, and you were its life.
We were giants.
This heel was bloody, these hands gripped like steel;
We were the heroes, we were the colossi.
WORMS. No, you were nothing.
A SKULL. Always on my knees before amulets, I
Peopled the black gibbet with skeletons.
Men feared my balcony.
O worms, your gloomy tooth gnaws me all day long.
Where did you come from, executioners, vermin?
WORMS. From Montfaucon's bones.
SECOND SKULL. A cowardly king, I left my country in ruins.
Betrayed by me, I watched my people fall
Beneath the trees in my park.
With English flames I reddened the sky of France.
Where did you come from, worms of my suffering?
WORMS. From Joan of Arc's bones.
THIRD SKULL. O death, when will this endless torment cease?
At least a million of them cover my body.
O hostile tomb!
My poor king's flesh falls off me in tatters.
Who sent you here to me, hideous worms?
WORMS. Bartholomew's Eve.
FOURTH SKULL. Gallant as Henry, no less brave than Xaintrailles,
I raised France to her feet and built Versailles.
I was the silvergilt King.
As in the heart of a flower, blighted, cankered,
Devouring worms, what hatched you out in my eyes?
WORMS. Sire, your sun.
EARTH. O kings! beneath future husbandmen's feet
You'll grow again as cockle and poisonous tare.
Crime doesn't forgive.
You'll live again as thistles on some hillside,
You will be crowns of thorns upon the heads
Of crucified gods.
You'll be reborn in weeds on the river-bank,
You'll be hemlock on the lips of Socrates.
Tyrants, conquerors, soldiers,
Stinging nettles will grow out of your heads;
In the darkness, beasts will browse upon you
And Judas pluck you.

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Upon the crumbling battlements of your turrets
You'll cling like moss brushed by the winds' wings
Or crushed wisps of grass;
Each of you, kings whose names are spoken with terror,
Shall be reborn, after trampling too long on men's heads,
Beneath their feet.
THE AIR SHAFT. Gaze through this hole and hope, accursed ones,
Forget who you are, deliverance shines through the stars,
Look, on the horizon;
Those planets are Heaven's jewels, but, more than that,
They are the shining key-holes of all the locks
Of all your prisons.

*(All the tombs that stood open close. That of Louis XV, which had remained shut, opens. The King's body can be seen. He lies with hands crossed on his breast. Four coffin nails lengthen slowly and pierce both hands and feet. The body utters a terrible cry.)*

FIRST NAIL. I am the nail of iron, from whence you came.
Live again, monster! I am Damien's knife.
I deliver you to the punishment of the metals,
My murder of you shall be to make you live.
You shall be iron.
SECOND NAIL. You shall be worse than that.
Be cursed by iron, and be punished by gold!
You shall be born as money, and in vile places
Accommodate yourself to buy women's virtue.
The tyrant will suffer from the evil he seeks,
And you shall keep your monstrous name of *louis*.
You will run from the filthy orgy in the brothel,
And I mark your soul with its proper effigy.
You shall be gold.
THIRD NAIL. Soul of the damned, I am granite.
I am that nail which holds the prisoner.
In a world full of obscure penitence,
I am the ground on which the gallows stand.
O kings, my duty is to torment your bones
And see that your dead gibbets lie in your tomb.
So long as the gallows tree, rooted in crime,
In the dark flower of its knot strangles your victims,
You, beneath these paving stones, must feel
That knot its root about your murderers' necks.
I am he who feels skeletons shudder.
I am the pillory, I am the dungeon.
Heaven's decree, despot, is that you be
Sentenced to serve as a stone in a prison wall.

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FOURTH NAIL. I am the human nail. Miserable phantom,
You shall expiate all.
KING. A man again?
FOURTH NAIL. Yes, I promise you.
KING. There is a way, then,
To take on my form again?
FOURTH NAIL. Yes.
KING. What must I do?
FOURTH NAIL. Good.
KING. How?
FOURTH NAIL. Accursed man, your life is a great abyss
Into which crime fell like a waterfall.
But you may raise the corner of your shroud.
KING. Speak.
FOURTH NAIL. A single one of your crimes sums up the rest.
KING. Which?
FOURTH NAIL. A happy couple, thanks to you, bleeds and suffers.
Two children at play fell into your abyss,
Jerome and Nihila.
KING. My eyes were blinded.
What shall I do?
FOURTH NAIL. They are lost.
KING. What shall I do?
FOURTH NAIL. Save them.

That is the end of Act One. We don't yet know for certain whether Act Two was ever dictated or what it was to contain. Evening sessions were resumed, and Androcles's lion reappeared. Each time, he gave a different name: *Frons Ingens Deserti, Solitudo,* the Shadow's Gaze, *Unguis Clemens, Omen Lumen Numen.* Ninety more lines of verse were dictated, and that concluded the long and splendid poem in, we may note, the stanza form in which the chorus of bones and worms in the play is set. At the close of the poem, it is still night, everything falls quiet, an Angel of Mercy speaks to the animal, the plant and the mineral kingdoms, including worm and skull.

Le cri des vautours cesse avec le chant des merles;
La fontaine interrompt le babil de ses perles;
C'est l'heure des remords;
Tout entend parler l'être aux ailes diaphanes,
Et le ver du tombeau l'écoute au fond des crânes
Par l'oreille des morts.
Ce fut, sous ce regard de la grande prunelle,
Une adoration pensive et solennelle;

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L'arbre dit: aimons-nous!
Tout pria, le caillou se vit une auréole;
Ce qui rampe se crut des ailes, ce qui vole
Se sentit des genoux.

On Thursday, August 17th, the knocking was very indistinct.

VACQUERIE. Is something worrying you?
*(One knock.)*
What is it?
LION. *Felis miser.*
VACQUERIE. Can you tell us what you mean?
*(Two knocks.)*
HUGO. It *is* the lion?
*(One knock.)*

One of course supposes that Androcles's lion is describing itself as an unhappy cat, for whatever reason. But no. To that evening's very brief transcript is added a note in Victor Hugo's handwriting, made next day.

August 18th. I write this note the following morning. During the night, Auguste Vacquerie's tabby was taken with violent fits. We only found her this morning, at nine o'clock, very ill.

And that was the end of Androcles's lion, the most engaging of all the Jersey spirits.

During the days which followed, a local resident put questions in English and was answered in English by Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott. The Shadow of the Tomb became simply Death, and at a series of afternoon sessions from September to November, with a long break towards the end but adding up to something between twenty and thirty hours, communicated a very great deal. There was nothing fortuitous about this. The tables were replying to a question distinctly formulated by Hugo on September 19, at half past one in the afternoon:

HUGO. The spirits which inhabit the invisible world know that, for some twenty-five years, I have been occupied with matters which these tables have raised and deepened. The great and mysterious beings which listen to me look when they please into my thoughts, as one looks into a cellar with a torch. At times, here, they have cast around my little miner's lamp the irradiation of lightning and meteors. I was *commanded* to write verses calling for pity on those captive and sentenced beings which make up what the unseeing call inanimate nature. Am I to continue?

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The short answer was, of course, *yes*. But the rappings conveyed a whole philosophy of universal, pantheistical sympathy between all things and beings. The reader will perhaps take the present writer's word for it that this long communication is of magnificent sweep and conducted with splendid imagery.

At the first session recorded for 1855, on February 11, after dinner, Jesus Christ appeared, not for the first time. He ratified the proceedings in no uncertain terms. There had, he said, been four great revelations to humankind: Druidism, Christianity, that of the French Revolution, and that of the tables. By March 1, however, we are back on traditional spook territory. There was snow on the ground in Jersey, and for the past fortnight there had been reports from various parts of the island of a figure clad in a black shroud.

HUGO. What are we to make of this apparition?
A SPIRIT, *known earlier as the Spectre*. Nothing.
HUGO. What are we to make of the imprints found a fortnight ago in Devonshire? The English papers are full of nothing else. The *London Illustrated* gives a picture. The footmarks are shaped like a horse-shoe, about eight inches apart, and they've been found over a distance of a hundred miles broken by an arm of the sea. They're found on walls and house-tops as well as on the ground. There is no doubt about their authenticity.
SPECTRE. They were caused by an enormous polar bird which has lost the use of one foot.

Plato appeared on April 29 and spoke, not uninterestingly, about dreams and the self creative in sleep. Molière continued with a poem he'd started over a year before, in all not much less than the contribution of Androcles's lion, just under two hundred and fifty lines. They are not in the least like Molière. After a break of over a month, there was one short session on July 2, at half past nine in the evening. Hugo had not been present at the previous session and was not present that evening. The scribe was Jules Allix, a comparative newcomer.

A SPIRIT, *which begins without preamble*. Eternity's name is to-morrow, its Christian name is to-day. Art is consciousness of the beautiful. Happiness is the honey of the stars. Man is their bee. God is master of the hive of suns. To be good is to be free. Pity is the key to grief. To console is to calm. A tear heals both him who sheds it and him on whom it falls. Tears are joy's wedding-present

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to love. A child is the sprig of a dead man. Graveyards are the greenhouses of God.

MME. HUGO. You know that it was Mme. de Girardin who introduced us to the tables. If you could tell us a little something about her, I should be deeply touched.

THE SPIRIT. We do not speak of the newly dead. Freshly dug graves lie too wide open, and God talks to the newly resurrected. God's word is the mystery of the silence of the dead. There are those of the dead who speak and those who listen.

MME. HUGO. Thank you. Will you tell us your name?

SPIRIT. Isaiah.

That is the last session of which, to date, any transcript has been published. The following month, Allix went out of his mind and tried to kill Charles Hugo and Auguste Vacquerie. He was taken away, and the tables were abandoned. In early autumn, the exiles took up steeple-chasing. Hugo then moved to Guernsey, where, the following year, he bought the wonderful Hauteville House, with its view, from Hugo's study at the top, of St. Peter Port below, Herm and Sark beyond, the coast of Normandy some thirty miles away and thus, I suppose, rarely if ever visible. The house belongs to the City of Paris, and how one envies the curator. There, during the next fourteen years, Hugo wrote all his greatest work in both verse and prose.

We cannot, therefore, regret the Jersey interlude. All creative processes are mysterious, and, apart from what they themselves produced, those communal sessions recharged the creative energies of a human dynamo, certainly one of the two or three most powerful known to literary history. Transcripts of the sessions began to appear in 1923. The prologue to the play and a summary of the rest were published in 1954, but not the fact that it had been dictated at the tables or was ascribed to a spirit purporting to be Shakespeare. There were further additions in 1963, and all now appears in the *Oeuvres Dramatiques et Critiques Complètes* published by Pauvert, under the general editorship of Francis Pouvet. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first appearance of any of it in English, though I caused a little of it to be broadcast on British radio. Any publisher who wants me to translate the rest will have to hurry up with his offer, as I am now older than Hugo was when he first went to Guernsey.

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WENDELL BERRY

# The Country of Marriage

1
I dream of you walking at night along the streams
of the country of my birth, warm blooms and the nightsongs
of birds opening around you as you walk.
You are holding in your body the dark seed of my sleep.

2
This comes after silence. Was it something I said
that bound me to you, some mere promise
or, worse, the fear of loneliness and death?
A man lost in the woods in the dark, I stood
still and said nothing. And then there rose in me,
like the earth's empowering brew rising
in root and branch, the words of a dream of you
I did not know I had dreamed. I was a wanderer
who feels the solace of his native land
under his feet again and moving in his blood.
I went on, blind and faithful. Where I stepped
my track was there to steady me. It was no abyss
that lay before me, but only the level ground.

3
Sometimes our life reminds me
of a forest in which there is a graceful clearing
and in that opening a house,
an orchard and garden,
comfortable shades, and flowers
red and yellow in the sun, a pattern
made in the light for the light to return to.
The forest is mostly dark, its ways
to be made anew day after day, the dark
richer than the light and more blessed
provided we stay brave
enough to keep on going in.

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4
How many times have I come into you out of my head
with joy, if ever a man was,
for to approach you I have given up the light
and all directions. I come to you
lost, wholly trusting like a man who goes
into the forest unarmed. It is as though I descend
slowly earthward out of the air. I rest in peace
in you, when I arrive at last.

5
Going away from you, I wear your love like a beautiful coat,
and there is a vivid power I have taken from you living in
my back and loins.
All the women who see me see that I am a man well taught to
love a woman,
and that I wear a woman's love like a fitted coat.
How generous and brave you are to let me get away with it.

6
Our bond is no little economy based on the exchange
of my love and work for yours, so much for so much
of an expendable fund. We don't know what its limits are,
and that puts it in the dark. We are more together
than we know, how else could we keep on discovering
we are more together than we thought?
You are the known way leading always to the unknown,
and you are the known place to which the unknown is
always
leading me back. More blessed in you than I know,
I possess nothing worthy to give you, nothing
not belittled by my saying that I possess it.
Even an hour of love is a moral predicament, a blessing
a man may be hard up to be worthy of. He can only
accept it, as a plant accepts from all the bounty of the
light
enough to live, and then accepts the dark,
passing unencumbered back to the earth, as I
have fallen time and again from the great strength
of my desire, helpless, into your arms.

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7
What I am learning to give you is my death
to set you free of me, and me from myself
into the mystery of where and what we are.
The love flowing between us, like the water
of a deep stream, is always too much. We
did not make it. Though we drink till we burst
we cannot have it all, or want it all.
In its abundance it survives our thirst.
In the evening we come down to the shore
to drink our fill, and sleep, while it
flows on through the regions of the dark.
It does not hold us, except we keep returning
to its rich waters thirsty. In that thirst
we are bound to the earth's life. We enter,
willing to die, into the commonwealth of its joy.

8
I give you what is unbounded, passing from dark to dark,
containing darkness: a night of rain, an early morning.
I give you the life I have let live for love of you:
a clump of orange-blooming weeds beside the road,
the young orchard waiting in the snow, our own life
that we have planted in this ground, as I
have planted mine in you. I give you my love for all
beautiful and honest women that you gather to yourself
again and again, and satisfy—and this poem,
no more mine than any man's who has loved a woman.

# Breaking

Did I believe I had a clear mind?
It was like the water of a river
flowing shallow over the ice. And now
that the rising water has broken
the ice, I see that what I thought
was the light was part of the dark.

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# The Old Elm by the River

Shrugging in the flight of its leaves,
it is dying. Death is slowly
standing up in its trunk and branches
like a camouflaged hunter. In the night
I am wakened by one of its branches
crashing down, heavy as a wall, and then
lie sleepless, the world changed.
That is a life I know the country by.
Mine is a life I know the country by.
Willing to live and die, we stand here,
timely and at home, neighborly as two men.
Our place is changing in us as we stand,
and we hold up the weight that will bring us down.
In us this land enacts its history.
When we stood it was beneath us, and was
the strength by which we held to it
and stood, the daylight over it
a mighty blessing we cannot bear for long.

# Some of the Parts

Who can know everything?
The light is too well divided.
The willow whose buds are creeping
green along the stems,
the black rooster whose tail feathers
fling in the spring wind,
and I with my bucket of yellow corn
like a lantern at winter's end
—each of us is guided
into the season by his fragment
of the world's Morning. I speak,
and the rooster and the willow carry
the sentence a little farther on.
We don't know the rest of what we say.

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# Zero

The river steams in the cold.
Above it the streams
impend, locked like iron
in the frozen hollows. The cold
reaches of the sky
have leapt onto the ground.
But the wren's at home
in the cubic acre of his song.
House and shed and barn
stand up around their lives
like songs. And even I
have a persistent music in me,
like water flowing under ice,
that says the warmer days
will come, blossom and leaf
return again. I live in that,
a flimsy enclosure maybe,
but the song's for singing
not for dreading the end of.
The end, anyhow, is always here.
It is the climate we sing in.
A man may ease off into it
any time, like a settler,
tired of farming, starting out
silently into the woods.
On a day like this we have
the end in sight. This is zero,
the elemental poverty
of all that was ever born,
in which nothing lives by chance
but only by choosing to
and by knowing how—and by
the excess of desire that rises
above the mind, surrounding
and hovering like a song.

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# Her First Calf

Her fate seizes her and brings her
down. She's heavy with it. It
wrings her. The great weight
is heaved out of her. It eases.
She moves into what she has become,
sure in her fate now
as a fish free in the current.
She turns to the calf who has broken
out of the womb's water and its veil.
He breathes. She licks his wet hair.
He gathers his legs under him
and rises. He stands, and his legs
wobble. After the months
of his pursuit of her, now
they meet face to face.
From the beginnings of the world
his arrival and her welcome
have been prepared. They have always
known each other.

# Poem

Willing to die,
you give up
your will. Keep still
until, moved
by what moves
all else, you move.

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BRENDAN GALVIN

# The Winter Runner

Then he invented the running wolf behind the wind,
the rifle barrel edged from frozen bushes,
stories for turning sluggish ropes of blood,

reddening the rorschach in his heart's
salt cave. For courage he recalled
the inchworm going home,

high in the glow of summer dusk,
two-hundred forty times above itself.
His forehead slicked with dross

of the distilling blood.
He felt his eye roam clear,
drink in the afternoon:

the amber sun, the low hills afterthoughts
between the sea and sky,
ice locked in ringed panes

like the years of trees.
In loose flocks, evening grosbeaks
flung out of their branches,

yellow flags a summer had left over.
Then he was running where
pines dipped their shadows in a sluice

of water. Slowing to walk against the wind
he let slip through his fingers,
as quiet as the time, time entered in:

the orange, thumbnail tip of sun
and last fruits of day: eelgrass softening
from tan to plum:

sky going down on fire
behind an island: the purpling sea:
sky citrus, pear, then empty of these lights.

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# Proposals Made in the Name of Reason

Of the paranoia of supermarkets,
the sonic boom shuddering the umbilicus,
rainbows collapsed on rivers of grit,
acknowledge your fears.
Abjure the midnight light of gas stations:
where the sludge of engines is poured
nothing can grow.

*

Before there are woodchucks
whose entrails smoke with heat of decibels,
let us no longer patronize the earth.
Uncapitalize all Nature;
not dreaming of abstract trees,
but watching the blue smoulder
of certain pines.

*

For what they have done,
invented the rain of acid, the toy
no fungus can yet return to soil,
there may be men who deserve
to spin bumbling out of fires.

*

Bashful before common things,
the burdock and pigweed, anemone, godwit
and scoter, the young who bend to each other
the springing reeds of their bodies,
return to earth dominion
over the risen dust of all its creatures.

*

With arms opened wide as water
praise earth's secret face.

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# The Lost Story

*(a parable of genocide)*

Then it was gone like
smoke: finding
a crack
in the hogan,
it expired
on the last breath.

The wind
scratches through a canyon
with a straw
picked up somewhere
among monoliths.

What a brave song it was.
There may have been
a coyote in it
who told an enemy's
secret. Surely a wing
feather of a god
who couldn't remain,
worn among silver
and turquoise;
and a maiden's half-joy
in the throes
of her knowledge of evening?

As when, in the breaking of clay,
two pieces are never
whole again, something is gone.

Or in the folding away
of the body, when we ask
ourselves, ashamed,
*What is this untouchable*
*thing, present now*
*by a conspicuous vacancy?*

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# Stealing the Christmas Greens

Fifty miles down the road you can give
five bucks to some guy
with a thread-riddled nose
like a roadmap of Vermont
and get a symmetrical tree.
Not me. Third growth pine
is best, where sand farmers have failed
and where it was recut
to fire a try-works in whaling days.
A broken puzzle of snow on the ground,
wear a coat long enough to bootleg in
a saw. This bottom was Ned
McLaughlin's, those mounds
are where he spaded his dead
horses. Look close
and you might see a wicket of ribs
stick up like a rotting skiff.
Now look for a tree
whose northeast side isn't flat
with wind off Georges Bank.
Be sure to top it high and light enough
so you can drag it back. Keep off the roads,
or if you really have to move,
being seen, balance it easily over
one shoulder. It's more than likely
once you set it up you'll see the top
won't point, but forks,
imperfect as a life, no pinnacle
for an angel. A green bow
and a chocolate Santa Claus
dressed in red foil will camouflage
that grey spot on the trunk.
Now plug it in, no talk of ritual,
get out the bourbon (each sip's
Christmas Eve), and rinse a glass clean
for the chief of police.

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WILLIAM DICKEY

# First Night Gone

The dog should be here.
Someone should be here.
Not just the little hiss of the lamp
and the furnace whispering.

Too much whisky and memory
in an empty house.

Where you are, I hope you are better
and rest, and that your fear eases a little.
It's good to be quiet sometimes, to fall into quiet
as through and beyond slow water.

And outside, where you are, the dog will race
through country sunshine, inquisitive and free.

But I hope you can pack your bag and come back Wednesday
and I not frighten you or fall from you
into absence of person, of affection or belief,
into a no-self, ignoring your face and voice.

"What do you need me for," you asked, "really?"
I need you to come home, because you are home.

# Monday Night

Moving, at the far edge of my window,
a moon the shape of an old face
fades & brightens
as the fog drifts in front of it.

Not a skull,
only a face starting to imagine
what its skull might be.

It is the only thing in the heaven.

It is not helped or accompanied by any stars.

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EDWARD SEIDENSTICKER

# Mishima Yukio

We will have to wait for tidings from another world, or perhaps for a reincarnation in this one of a sort that he himself seems to have put much stock in, before we can know with what feelings Mishima Yukio had his last say to the soldiers under that late-November noonday sun, turned to go back into the general's office, and then disemboweled himself. To judge from the recording of his last exhortation, it cannot have been with a pleasant warmth as of being sent on the way by friends. Some of the soldiers shouted chidings for past misdeeds, some suggested that he go take a cold shower, some merely called him a fool; and Mishima's own voice is scarcely to be heard over the raucous comments. Photographs of the assembly he addressed are dominated by the blandly amused sort of face the chimpanzee must see through the bars of his cage. The newspaper reports are agreed that Mishima's own face was blanched as, having given up the effort to outshout them all, he left the balcony.

He must have been disappointed at the want of acclaim with which he was seen off. But was the ultimate outcome of the day's affairs a result of miscalculation? Some think so. Some think that he really hoped for a military rising and could not more completely have misjudged the mood of the country boys who join the army, or, more properly, the Ground Self Defense Force. Others think that the shame of having faced the country boys and been jeered made the shame of having to face the world again more than he could bear. Either theory would lead to the conclusion, or at least the strong implication, that he expected to be among the living when the sun went down.

The burden of the evidence is that he did not. His last messages seem to say quite clearly that he saw suicide as the reasonable conclusion to what he had undertaken. So does the declaration he distributed to the troops that last noontide. His mature view of the Self Defense Force, as remembered for the newspapers and magazines by his friends, would seem to be such that he

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cannot have expected many to come forward from its ranks and join him.

Another view is that, victim of the temporary depression that comes at the end of prolonged artistic endeavor, he was not himself. It is true that on the very eve of his death he sent off the last instalment of his last work, a massive and very impressive tetralogy called *Sea of Fertility,* and it is also true that he had earlier expressed great apprehension about his state of mind, about the void that was certain to open in his life, once the tetralogy was finished. Yet he did not dawdle over it, as he probably would have had the apprehension been deep. Quite the reverse: his editors had not expected the fourth volume to be finished for some months, and were astonished at the size of the last instalment and the speed with which it had been produced. The end of the tetralogy, which he was fond of calling his "life's work," may have provided the occasion for his suicide, but the suicidal impulses must have gone much deeper.

The final statement distributed to the troops hints, or may be construed as hinting, that Mishima had hoped to have more company than he did in that last demonstration. As it reaches a conclusion, he describes the long wait (four years, he says it has been) he and the little drill troop the papers have called his "private army" waited for the military to declare itself and so provide muscular tone for the flabby physique of postwar Japan.

> But we will wait only thirty minutes more, the last thirty minutes. We will rise together, and, for what is right, we will die together.
>
> We will die to take Japan back to its true self. . . .
>
> Now, even now, we mean to demonstrate for you the existence of values higher than life.
>
> Not freedom, not democracy. Japan. Japan, land of the history and the tradition we love.

Even here it seems necessary to interpret the "we" as having reference only to Mishima and his immediate attendants, and perhaps among the latter only to the single youth who did in fact join him.

Early in the statement there is a summary of what has gone wrong with post-war Japan: economic growth has been everything, the spiritual realm has been forgotten; hypocrisy, self-interest, individualism have proliferated; larger responsibilities

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have been abdicated, left to foreign countries; the land and its tradition have been sullied. "In the Self Defense Force, we have hoped to find, even now, a last remnant of the true warrior spirit, of the true Japan."

It summons back memories of a great deal, this all-absorbing passion to rectify, this concern with principle so intense that beside it Thoreau's night in jail seems pale and womanish indeed. It reminds one of various nationalist risings and conspiracies of the past century and especially the army revolt of 1936. Running through them all and especially the last is the same concern with greed and hypocrisy, the same conviction that "right" is immediately apprehensible to the unsullied heart, that he who throws away all for the sake of what is right wins all. And the crucial importance in Mishima's last statement of the word here translated "right" brings an old Chinese tradition to mind. The word is *gi* in Japanese, *i* or *yi* in Chinese; and in an idealistic and optimistic strain of Chinese thought, or feeling, which the Japanese have found very congenial, it stands for a transcendent order of which we are aware so long as we do not allow our natal purity to be clouded—so long as greed and hypocrisy and materialism and all those other things are not allowed to get in the way.

This Sino-Japanese tradition was very important to Mishima, probably from his most impressionable days. He was just twenty when the war ended, ready for a sortie into the heroic which was abruptly denied him, and strongly under the influence of the dealers in heroics with whom the day abounded. If his writings of the Fifties, and it is from that decade that most of his translated works date, have seemed to some of us a little too facile, too clever, that is perhaps because he kept his early inclinations out of sight while his name and his fortune were growing. From about 1960, particularly in several short pieces having to do with the 1936 rising, he seemed to start talking once more about things that really mattered to him; and however one feels about Mishima's sort of "right," the best novels of his last decade, in which it figures prominently, are of great power, standing out against a literature the best products of which have tended to be delicate and lyrical.

There is another sense in which it can be argued that Mi-

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shima's plans got out of control and he would as soon not have committed suicide. He had been rehearsing the virtuous suicide for so long, it may be argued, that the time had come to put up or shut up. He was beginning to look a little specious in the eyes of his drill troop, whose respect was important to him. That problem aside for the moment—essentially it is the problem of how seriously all the talk about right and purity is to be taken—the rehearsals of suicide in his writings seem very immediate and on the whole convincing. The first overt rehearsal, though the dream of martyrdom had been with Mishima from the start, comes in 1960, with a harrowing story the English translation of which is entitled "Patriotism." "Concern about the State of the Nation" would be more accurate, but one would not wish to impose it upon any story. The hero is a young army officer who commits suicide after the 1936 rising, and Mishima himself played the lead with almost too much gusto in the very popular movie version.

But the most apposite rehearsal comes in *Sea of Fertility*. The tetralogy covers a sweep in time from before the First World War down to yesterday. Formally, it centers upon the theme of reincarnation, which Mishima has told us he borrowed from a late-Heian romance. In the second of its incarnations, the protagonistic ectoplasm is made manifest in the person and deeds of a young man who, in the fevered patriotism of the Thirties, does not hesitate to do violence for what seems to him right. Toward the end of the second volume he is on trial for having participated in an abortive attempt at righteous violence. Under examination by the presiding judge, he explains his motives at length, and the resemblance to Mishima's own last statement scarcely requires comment.

> Yes. I wanted to carry out the principle of the unity of knowledge and action, the main principle of the school of Wang Yang-ming. "To know and not to act is not yet to know." Knowing of the corruption around us, of the dark clouds that close off the future of Japan, the poverty of farm villages and the sufferings of the poor; knowing that the origins of it all are in corrupt government and in an irresponsible moneyed class whose interests are served by the corruption; knowing that these are the roots of the growth that cuts off the light of His Revered and Benevolent Majesty: knowing all this, I find it evident that to know is to act.

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In response to a request from the judge for a less abstruse statement, the youth describes a wish of long standing to emulate the young of the Meiji Restoration, for whom swordsmanship was more than a pastime, and proceeds to a detailed accounting of the humiliation to which the nation has been subjected since the London Treaty, and of social injustices brought on by the greed of the ruling classes.

> I have believed that the dark clouds which mask heaven must one day be swept away, that a clear and radiant Japan must one day emerge. But waiting does no good. The longer we wait the darker are the clouds. . . . And who then will take upon himself the responsibility for the grand mission, go up and speak to heaven with his own death? . . . *A pure and resolute act is necessary to bring heaven and earth together.* [The underlining is in the original.]

And, as his eloquence reaches a climax:

> Loyalty is to throw one's life away and seek to be in accord with the great heart. It is to rend the clouds and ascend to the center of the sun, of the great heart. This is the whole of the vow which my fellows and I made to ourselves.

The expression "great heart" is, in the very elaborate context, by no means as emptily rhetorical as it may sound here, with the context stripped away. It has reference to the emperor as head of the mystical Japanese state, and has much in common with the "true warrior spirit" and "true Japan" of Mishima's own last statement.

The judge is much moved and the young man receives a suspended sentence; and then he does go out and kill a rich man, ostensibly in punishment for a desecration of the Great Shrine of Ise, where the imperial ancestors reside. The volume ends with a lyrical description of his suicide, in the dead of night on a cliff overlooking the sea.

> Isao took a deep breath and rubbed his abdomen with his left hand. Then, closing his eyes, he brought the point of the dagger against it with his right hand, gave direction with the fingers of his left hand, and pressed with all the strength of his right arm.
>
> In the moment the dagger entered, the sun rose glowing red behind his eyelids.

Wang Yang-ming was a heterodox Confucian thinker of Ming China, and it is to the concept at the center of his philosophy

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that the young man alludes as he begins his apologia. "Knowledge is the beginning of action," said Wang Yang-ming; "action is the completion of knowledge." And: "There have never been people who know but do not act. Those who are supposed to know but do not act simply do not yet know."

The optimistic and genially romantic tendencies of Wang Yang-ming and his school were naturalized by the Japanese and given a more wildly romantic aspect. Young Isao, in the declamatory remarks that so move the judge, makes reference to young men of the Meiji Restoration. If the origins of the Meiji Restoration are pushed back to the arrival of Commodore Perry, then the young man who comes to mind as perhaps the intensest and most accomplished of them, and certainly the one who made the greatest name for blind dedication, is Yoshida Shōin. In his early twenties when Perry arrived, he tried to smuggle himself aboard one of the American ships that he might go abroad and learn more of the enemy. Apprehended, imprisoned, and released, he continued to throw flames in the cause of fealty to the emperor. By 1859 the Shogunate had had enough, and he was put to death.

Robert Louis Stevenson presently learned of his unusual career, and, in *Familiar Studies,* wrote an essay about him.

> He was not only wise and provident in thought, but surely one of the fieriest of heroes in execution. . . . He failed in each particular enterprise that he attempted; and yet we have only to look at his country to see how complete has been his general success. His friends and pupils made the majority of leaders in that final Revolution, now some twelve years old; and many of them are, or were until the other day, high placed among the rulers of Japan.

Yoshida came from a Japanese school of Confucian purism that originated in the Seventeenth Century. The founder of the school, Yamaga Sokō, repudiated all the Neo-Confucians of Sung and Ming, including, presumably, Wang Yang-ming; yet his emphasis upon codes of behavior suggests strong affinity, and when he tells the samurai that studies unaccompanied by practical results diverge from the principal message of the Confucian sages, he is very near Wang and his "unity of thought and action." Yoshida's own favorite Confucian seems to have been not Confucius himself but Mencius, and Mencius' notions of a primordial purity to which we must return are basic to the doctrine of purity made

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manifest in action. Yoshida had a very practical idea of what learning should be, and its end was to set an example. If the example must be at the price of life itself, so be it. "I knew that if I did as I have done, this would be the result," he said in one of his last poems, composed as he was awaiting execution.[1]

And so through various risings and assassinations and attempted assassinations and other diverse incidents of a patriotic nature, down to Mishima. The tradition of suicide by way of example and edification may not be an entirely loveable one, but it is old and powerful, and Mishima, educated in a day of heroics and left to survive in a day of meliorism and sentimental liberalism, belongs at the end of it. Or so one would judge at the moment, though it may be that, like Yoshida, he set a more impressive example than one can know.

It will seem, perhaps, that too much is here being made of an oration by a fictitious hero. Good novels are replete with ambiguity and irony, and good novelists are devilishly clever at keeping us from identifying their own opinions with those of their characters. There can be little doubt all the same that Mishima's sympathies are with Isao. A strange Mishima collection published in 1966 under the title *Voices of Dead Heroes* and including "Patriotism" as well as a play and the generically indescribable title piece, a sort of rhapsody, concludes with an essay called "The February 26 Incident and I." The "Incident" is the army rising of 1936. "Literary ambitions quite aside," says Mishima toward the end of the piece, "there can be little doubt that I have carried deep within me a wish to console the spirits of the heroes who have ruled me for so long, to clear away the calumny that surrounds them, to rehabilitate them. . . ."

> The reign of the present emperor breaks cleanly in two with the defeat of 1945. For me who lived through the break there is an inextinguishable desire to seek out the grounds for my own continuity, for a logical consistency. . . . I find myself caught up less upon the new constitution, defining the emperor as a "symbol," than upon the emperor's own renunciation of his divinity.

After meditating upon the tragic consequences of the emperor's efforts, back in the Thirties, to be a constitutional monarch,

[1] Mishima killed himself on the anniversary of Yoshida Shōin's execution. It has been averred, but not firmly established, that he was aware of the fact.

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Mishima concludes with two rhetorical questions and an answer that is really a third question:

> Was constitutional monarchy ever really possible for Japan? Those statesmen of the Western persuasion, the heedless young army officers—which of the two was in the final analysis right? Japan would seem to have succeeded admirably in a crass kind of Westernization; and one wonders whether in the years that lie ahead, Japan will succeed as well with Westernization of a spiritual kind.

Mishima's displeasure with the "liberal" intellectuals who have dominated post-war Japanese journalism was quite open. He would have no part of their imported bromides. He was a complicated man, and one of the great puzzles about him will always be that a man who seemed to enjoy the company of Americans and Europeans, who was something of a Westernized dandy, and who littered his books with Western accessories and appliances should in the end have declared himself an unregenerate believer in the Japanese martial spirit. At least one explanation is that they, the self-styled liberals, were for him the un-Japanese xenophobes and he the true heir to the Japanese spirit in his energetic and sometimes daring pursuit of the most flamboyant new Western styles. He hated the liberal orthodoxy, in any case, and during the Fifties, when the professional intellectuals seemed to be running as a pack and their liberal dogmas offered the safest formulas for selling books, he went his own way. There is scarcely a suggestion of the political in his writings during the decade. He may have been driven to his final act, ironically, by the impotence of the intellectuals. He had hoped, he said more than once, that Left-wing disturbances in 1970, when Japan could for the first time legally denounce the Security Treaty with the United States, would be of sufficient proportions to force the government into a less ambiguous defense policy. Nothing emerged to make the government other than satisfied with ambiguity, and so the time had come for something dramatic on his side.

Yoshida Shōin made himself clear: he hoped that his death would inspire others to act. He thought of himself as the posthumous leader of a movement. Did Mishima? He did not, like Yoshida, contemplate assassinating anyone, and his followers were forbidden to inflict bodily injury upon the general they

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had in their power during the final balcony scene (though it has been reported that among those excluded from the scene were some who had more violent ideas). It is hard to believe, and most of the evidence above argues against the likelihood, that he expected immediate results. He knew the sybaritic youth of the land too well for that. What, then, of the long run? That is of course anyone's guess, though there are already intimations that the purity of his motives, if not precisely the script, for that last scene, is being offered as an ideal to strive toward. Such was the import of certain remarks made at memorial services early this year. He came, in any case, from a tradition to which suicide as grand gesture, as protest that may not be ignored, is no stranger; and one can imagine, whatever the hopes of his eulogists, that to be remembered as the last embodiment of the tradition would have been enough for him.

What rather brings the argument up short at this point is not the initial objection that his plans went awry but the possibility that what he did may have been not self-immolation at all but a grand act of self-gratification. Here his curious proclivities must come into the discussion. His writings fairly exude narcissism, as also did his spare-time activities, so to speak. He posed for the most extraordinary nude and near-nude photographs. The last English translation of a Mishima work to appear before his death has on the dust jacket a picture of Mishima clad in a loincloth and a head band and those garments alone, and the flap bears the credit line: "Jacket Design by Y. Mishima." If rebellion against the conformist ways of the liberals had something to do with his affecting the latest extremes in Western dress, so did the fact that the suits he chose, tight and running toward achromatic hues of high brilliance, were so uncommonly self-revealing. It is hard to believe, unless he was one of the most talented and thorough-going pretenders who ever lived, that he was other than captivated with what he saw in the mirror.

He made a cult of youthful masculine beauty. He went in for boxing and swordsmanship and body-building, and his horror of old age, the destroyer of it all, is voiced repeatedly in his work, both through symbol and in explicit declaration. There is, for instance, a short story (1965) called "The Peacocks," the very title of which seems a touch symbolic. It is so strange a story that

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in another context it would be worth analyzing in detail, for it is one of several Mishima works (including also the title piece of *Voices of Dead Heroes*) that would seem to have borrowed structural devices from the medieval Nō drama. The central incident is the mysterious slaughter of a flock of peacocks, and the central figure, who is first a middle-aged man and then, in a sequence resembling the second act of a Nō spirit play, his own youthful self, as the presumed assassin. Fascinated by the peacocks, he meditates upon the contrast between their plumage and their drawn and wizened faces. He concludes: "Only through their own destruction could the peacocks be made perfect. The brilliance of the plumage sustained the life in them, drawn taut like a bow, aimed at that one point, the slaughter."

The title of "Tenth-day Chrysanthemums," the play in *Voices of Dead Heroes,* is more explicit. It has reference to something that is no longer needed or someone who has outlived his day, the Festival of the Chrysanthemums coming on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. The hero is a man who has lived to be old when he should have died in the 1936 rising. In the essay that concludes the volume Mishima makes very explicit indeed the horror such a prospect arouses in him: "Among the notions I have not been able to rid myself of is that of old age as forever ugly, youth forever beautiful. The knowledge that comes with age is forever murky, the action of youth is forever clear. We decline, we grow worse, the longer we live. A man's life is but a falling backward into decay."

To the narcissism and the cult of youthful beauty must be added the cult of love death, of eroticism joined to death and especially to suicide. Mishima has said that the Japanese have taken the love suicide to heights no one else has reached, and (he was half jesting, but one senses a deep seriousness all the same) that it is one of their principal claims to what their "image" abroad has so frequently denied them, originality. A preoccupation with death astonishing in one so young runs through even his earliest works, and the union of self-destruction and sexual joy has its most explicit statement in "Patriotism."

And Mishima's homosexuality must also be added to the complex, and the fact that, like the medieval warrior, he chose to die in an exclusively masculine setting, and with young men to help

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him die and, if they so chose, and one of them did, to die with him. Put all these cults and tendencies together, and there it is: the case for the prosecutor who would argue that Mishima died not to startle the world into a new awareness of an old, honorable, neglected, and perhaps dying tradition, but to taste of the ultimate joy and avoid the horrors of showing the world a haggard face and a sagging body.

So it may be that even the writings of Mishima's last decade, which seem so honest in their espousal of tradition and nationalism, take on a cynical cast. Mishima warned us of irony in, for instance, the title of *Sea of Fertility,* borrowed from one of the barren seas of the moon; but if the tetralogy itself is part of a grand pose, then the irony is such as to make one stand still in admiration. Whatever may be the case with his last writings, the novels of his middle period, the decade of the Fifties, have come to look rather different in the light of his final acts. I myself have long held that their most apparent qualities are excessive cleverness and deplorable evidence of a willingness to pander to the reader. Now, perhaps, they may be seen as exquisitely planned and elegantly executed nose-thumbings at that very reader. Probably the best of them is *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion.* A very annoying book on first reading now, suddenly, comes to seem rather delicious. It may be that in the precious explications of a Zen riddle Mishima is out-Zenning them all, suggesting through the very preciosity and sophistry of the words the meaninglessness of words without action.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

# Letter from Tokyo

ALMOST ANYWHERE ELSE YOU'VE EVER BEEN, you can make an effort to "pass," but in Japan you're a helpless outsider from the minute you get off the plane, with its fetid, drunken cargo of foulmouthed, mindless, undisciplined American military. On the plane, you could at least remember a norm and pretend to be it; but once in Japan, you're wrong too many ways at once. Your body is too big, your nose is too long and the wrong shape, you certainly don't fit in, and yet you don't clearly stand *against* anything either. You're just wrong. In the endless tides of Tokyo traffic, you're the only pair of blue eyes for miles around: a spook. And everybody knows, before you open your mouth, that you can't say anything comprehensible. The problem isn't one of personal kindness or good intentions; most people are decent enough about it. You are simply unutterably different. And the best things you ever learn about Japan are just amplifications of that original sensation.

Inevitably, a lot of one's thoughts in Tokyo are taken up with language and transportation. They are obsessive problems, but outside the immediate situation, they aren't worth more than a paragraph apiece. You can't talk the language, you can't learn the language, you can't pick up that little pittance of menu- and directions-language that enables you to look faintly competent elsewhere. Even when you learn to recognize a Japanese character, you can't tell how to pronounce it. When you've learned to pronounce a few phrases, you still don't know how to read or write them. When you have learned to read a simple name, you learn without surprise that there are two other scripts in which the name can be written, neither of which resembles in any way the one you know. It eases matters, of course, that the Japanese themselves find their language difficult to a degree. The waitress or cashier in a restaurant assumes as a matter of course that the menu is useless to you: outside the restaurant, there are probably plaster models of the dishes available inside, and you can point at them. A subway guard or a policeman or a kind passerby may venture on a few words of English; by contrast, it's the exceptional university student (especially if he's studying English literature) who is willing to trust himself to the alien tongue.

Getting around takes more trial-and-error than it does anywhere else you've ever been. The streets have no names, the houses have no numbers that mean anything, the maps are completely schematic and diagrammatic, the taxi-drivers don't know where anything is: if they pick you up at all, it's on the off chance that you're one of the rare

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*gaijin* who can tell them in detail how to get where you're going. And whenever they have a choice, they won't pick you up at all. An invitation to a cocktail party will include a map of the host's district, with all the landmarks described—an Esso station, a geta-shop, a mailbox, a fishstore. Restaurants advertising in the *Japan Times* don't give any addresses, only a telephone number; you call and tell them where *you* are, and they'll come out and guide you to where *they* are. Tokyo consists of hundreds of neighborhoods; people rarely venture out of their own. In Aoyama you may ask in vain for the road to Ebisu, half a mile away. As a matter of fact, it's a wide, straight street, that you need only follow. Nobody will know of it, Japanese or foreigner. You will be told to take the subway or to call a cab. You will be told that Ebisu is impossible to reach on foot. The mysterious East.

And yet all sorts of things are beautifully done, with the utmost efficiency and dispatch. The gadgets all work, the trains run spectacularly on time, buildings are completed, subways dug, streets repaired; most days people get where they're going, all the incredible millions of them. There's a good deal of miscellaneous filth in the streets, and of course the town is hideous from one end to the other. Whatever exquisite work Japanese architects may do in America, in their own land they produce the most abominable slabs of heavy, raw concrete, the most ragged, graceless designs this side of Novosibirsk. The districts are perfectly distinct, but somehow all equivalent; as there is no such thing as urban zoning, any given block can contain any conceivable mixture of old-style, unpainted wood houses, factories, gas stations, giant apartments, bowling alleys, bars, temples, parking lots, *und so weiter*. The city has neither style nor shape nor order; yet in some insane way it runs, it works. As you catch on to its rudiments, you get to see how, for you, it can be made to work better and better. One of the things that does most to make it work is, naturally, money.

Without any question at all, Tokyo is one of the most expensive cities in the world; with some question, it is also one of the cheapest. How to get these two facts into balance is the stranger's first problem. It begins with the fact that, as a foreigner, he will probably want to live "western style"—with central heat, chairs and a bed, a kitchen, and perhaps an elevator. For such an apartment (one-bedroom) he can pay, without the least difficulty, $1,000 a month. If he then decides to eat beefsteaks every night, drink Scotch whiskey, contribute to the prosperity of nightclub hostesses, and collect Japanese antiques (especially those connected with the tea-ceremony), he will be able to get through an impressive sum of money in short order, and have almost nothing to show for it. On the other hand, if he will take his chances with average-decent neighborhood restaurants, he need rarely pay more than $1 a meal, and a 28-cent (hundred-yen) lunch is perfectly feasible. He can drink a tolerable Japanese whiskey at $2.50 a half-gallon, and stay out of expense-account traps for nothing. If he lives Japanese-style,

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on tatami-mats with futons for a bed, eating rice and noodles cooked on a hibachi with an occasional bit of fish and pickled vegetable for flavor, there is almost no limit to how little he can get by on. In this most expensive city in the world, the average clerical worker makes, to start, a little more than $100 a month. Many people must get by on less—God knows how.

It is a working society. Construction starts on a building going up around the corner at 7 o'clock in the morning; under floodlights and loudspeakers, it is still going on at 9, 10, or 11 at night. And seven days a week. The cement-mixer never stops. The iron rods for the next storey are up before the cement poured to make the last storey has even begun to cure. Street repairs are done at night. You emerge in the morning to find a freshly-dug ditch running down the side of your street, with one of the diggers lying in it by a little wood fire in a tin can, fast asleep. He will wake up in due course, and go home. The pipe will be laid tonight, and the ditch filled in, the cement or blacktop will appear, the job will be done day after tomorrow. The local carpenter, the maker of tatami-mats, the fish-seller, the auto mechanic, the tailor, all expect to work the same hours; and they do. The subway-builders of Tokyo, who seem to have undermined half the city, hardly emerge from the plate steel carapace that shields their burrows. They must live down there all the time.

The pace of work and traffic, the tidal streams of people, people, people, the immense industrial sprawl and squalor all combine to make it seem like a frantic society; but there are backwaters and eddies everywhere. "Highly motivated and deeply disciplined" would likely describe the actual scene just as well as "frantic." The society moves in groups and batches, sometimes in what we would consider lockstep. There is a way to do things from which one does not lightly depart. Fifty little children from a school follow their teacher down the street: they are of identical size and appearance, they wear (both sexes) identical little green smocks, each holds onto the smock of a predecessor in the line as onto a handle. Schoolgirls of the ten-to-fifteen-year-old bracket wear identical blue serge middie blouses and midi skirts (Good God, what *my* children would have said about such a uniform!), and travel in huge flocks. Only a little less regimented are the office workers and bureaucrats, with their uniform black suits, white shirts, briefcases, and umbrellas, their ritual comings and goings. The incentives are communal. Everyone gets his year-end bonus at the same time, everyone attends the year-end office-party. On New Year's day two million Tokyoites file past the Meiji Shrine, an unbroken, unbelievable river of humanity. Good workers are rewarded by being sent on company-sponsored trips, in groups. One sees them on the trains, in the first-class cars—ten or a dozen men, a little stiff in their best clothes but after a while rough, cheerful, and relaxed. Their leader holds all the tickets and negotiates with the conductor; the men have been sup-

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plied with box lunches (rice and fish), and bottles of Japanese whiskey. They drink, laugh, eat, joke, sleep (but they tend to sit by themselves, away from the leader). Probably they are going to a hot spring for a week or so. There is no question of their wives going. Doubtless there will be bar-girls at the hot springs and their collateral massage-parlors. And then back to the routine for another year.

The work is done, the goods flow forth. Every day the papers record new triumphs on the world market: two giant electric generators sold to Mexico, four immense water-pumps to Iran, an oil tanker here, a half-dozen Diesel locomotives there. And the flood of small stuff does not consist of cheap gimcracks, as before the war—or at least, it is not just that. It is machine tools, precision instruments, optical goods, computers. I sit in a train just within earshot of a couple of executives from an American cotton mill, in South Carolina or Georgia, to judge by the accents. They have been to inspect some textile machinery at a plant on the east coast of Japan, and are heading back to their Kyoto hotel, weightily impressed with what they have seen. —Yes sir, that was a most impressive price on the spinning machine—a very fine instrument it was, with a triple frammis, did you notice? Why, we could get three of those for the price of. . . . And wasn't that a delicious lunch they served at the plant? Something they did with the shrimps; and, by George, that was real French wine! The lunch is in process of being discussed, slowly and lovingly, when the train approaches a junction—and suddenly two neat, smiling little men from the factory are present. They have been riding in the cheaper seats behind, but their purpose is to ensure that the customers make proper connections at the junction. They take them in hand, Dachshunds leading Saint Bernards, and trundle them off. Multiply that scene by a thousand, by five thousand, ten.

No doubt about it, modern Japan is a triumph. Its chosen symbol is the Hikari express train that runs like a streak of light (130 miles per hour) and with the frequency of a subway from Tokyo to Osaka. On one trip I sat in the Green Car next to another emblem of modern Japan: a portly, well-dressed executive type wearing the frequent anti-smog mask (a little strip of bandage hooked over the ears and covering the nose and mouth) and carrying the inevitable brief case. He sat down next to me, took off his shoes, pulled a comic book out of his brief case, scanned it a while, and fell fast asleep, snoring vigorously all the way to Nagoya. Nothing, I suspect, short of the Second Coming, could shake that man out of his doze or daze; and the society he symbolizes was equally secure—or seemed so, till it was shaken to its imaginative roots by the suicide, on November 25, of Yukio Mishima.

There was no mistaking the seismic impact it had. Not merely that thousands of posters, bearing Mishima's dark, sorrowful face, appeared around the universities, blotting out the red slogans plastered everywhere; not merely that his books were suddenly featured, in great

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piles, in the bookstores; not merely the continuing, impassioned discussion that went on for weeks in periodicals, in the parliament, in Tokyo coffeehouses. As a foreigner, I suddenly took on new interest for my students, my colleagues, the people to whom I talked on lecture tours. They all wanted to know what I thought of Mishima. Not that they were at all ready to tell me what *they* thought: quite the contrary. One of my students said simply, "I have thought about nothing else. I don't want to tell you (gesturing, not only at me, but at the rest of the class) what I think. It is too personal." After that, he scarcely *had* to tell me what he thought.

Why couldn't the Japanese dismiss Mishima's action as that of a madman? Prime Minister Sato tried to do so, but blew up a storm in the Diet. Everyone could see that, as a matter of practical politics, getting your head cut off isn't a feasible first step toward making an insurrection. As the discussions flowered, everyone came to see that Yukio Mishima didn't resemble a samurai warrior much better than Gabriele d'Annunzio resembled Cato the Censor. His action against the constitution for limiting Japan's power to wage war made no practical sense at all. Most of the nation's modern prosperity is due to its *lack of* a vast war-budget. There's nobody on the horizon that Japan can go to war with, or would conceivably want to. Yet Mishima's action struck very deep chords, chords that the younger generation had scarcely heard sounded in their lifetime, and that, they were stunned to discover, still vibrated. It was a "pure" action, a "beautiful" action: that was what all those posters said, with the overwhelming and irrefutable implication that pure and beautiful actions are rare in modern Japan. They are indeed. The man who snored beside me all the way to Nagoya didn't look as if he'd ever heard of one. *Seppuku* (ritual suicide) has this overwhelming significance in Japan; and Mishima had timed his act to coincide with the annual resurrection of a famous legend, still enormously vital throughout the land, the December production of "Chushingura" in the theaters and the ceremony of the 47 ronin (masterless samurai) at Sengakuji Temple in Tokyo.

The whole story goes back to the early eighteenth century, when weak, cowardly Kira Kozuke provoked proud Lord Asano into drawing his sword within the castle of the Shogun. Rules being rules, the Shogun told Lord Asano to commit ritual suicide, which he (rules being rules) promptly did. His followers (all 47 of them) might then have taken service with another daimyo; but under the calm, quiet leadership of Kuranosuke, they declared themselves masterless samurai, pretended resignation to the loss of their master, and meanwhile undertook a secret conspiracy to gain revenge by assassinating Kira Kozuke. On the night of December 14, 1702, they attacked his house, cut him to pieces, and then, like loyal subjects, put themselves at the disposition of the Shogun. After some misgivings (for they were already popular heroes), he ordered all 47 of them to commit *seppuku*—which they duly did.

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They now lie buried, all together, in the otherwise undistinguished little Sengakuji Temple, in southwest Tokyo, where every December 14th there is a festival in their honor.

But the real development of the legend lies in the domain of drama. Almost immediately the story of "Chushingura" (it means, I'm told, "the paragon of fidelity") became immensely popular on the kabuki stage; and it has continued so to this day. All sorts of subplots and thematic counterpoints wound themselves into the luxuriant foliage of the story; dance scenes, interludes, star-crossed lovers, brave children, faithful dogs, and scenes of bravura emotion got tangled up with the tale. It is always put on in December, generally in several versions, and it is always sold out. None of the versions ever presents the full story, which, by now, has grown enormous beyond the power even of Japanese audiences to sit through it. There were two versions for us to choose from. One was a miniaturized affair starting at 11:30 a.m., running through till 10:30 p.m., and presenting, either in whole or in part, seven of the play's eleven acts plus the michiyuki dance scene. Or else one could go to a submicromini, stripped-to-the-bone modern rewrite of the whole thing in five acts and fifteen scenes and lasting only five and a half hours. I am sorry to confess that, being essentially chicken, we went to the latter performance. It was a fine evening of theater, even for viewers whose capacity to understand the dialogue was limited to the odd word. With the aid of a printed English summary, one could easily follow the action; and the climactic scenes, which really grabbed the audience (producing from the galleries a curious choked gasp of acclaim, *Akgkghhhh!!!*) would have been comprehensible in Eskimo or Sanscrit. They were generally scenes of overwhelming emotion proudly dominated. When the 47 ronin (and there they are on stage, all 47 of them) receive word of their condemnation, they will display no reactions before the messenger, they are impassive and dignified. But when he withdraws, they fling themselves to the ground in a torrent of weeping. Artfully orchestrated, it rises, falls, sweeps across the stage like a tidal wave of sobs. For a full five minutes they weep. And in the midst of them, proud, unyielding, rocklike stands the heroic Kuranosuke—*Akgkghhhhh!!!* And so in the last scene where they solemnly march off to their deaths, with Kuranosuke watching over them and waiting to go last.

The scene at Sengakuji Temple on December 14th was less dramatic; one's problems were simply those of pushing through thousands of visitors and hundreds of booths, toward the little section of the cemetery where clouds of incense smoke made the 47 graves all but invisible. Who came to such a show? Not the television "personalities" or the sumo wrestlers or the public figures who inevitably occupy the cameras at any big public ceremony in Tokyo; instead, there were little old ladies, old gentlemen in retirement, working folk, common sorts. District people, curiosity seekers yes, but perhaps more than anyone else,

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the folk. What they celebrated was the paragon of fidelity, the men who avenged their dead lord out of loyalty when they had nothing to gain and everything to lose. These are the people who in 1945 did not know they were hopelessly beaten, and would not believe it till they were told by the Emperor himself that Japan had surrendered. They are insular, *borné,* district-bound—guided by the simplest and most rudimentary of straightforward values. When they worship old Japan ("the way," as it is called in all simplicity), it is not at all easy to guess how their feelings relate to new Japan. Is it a chivalric, anachronistic alternative to new Japan that they remember, or an old chauvinist Japan that they would like to build on the horrifying industrial power of the new Japan? Pretty surely, they don't know themselves. Even if they started out to do the one thing, what conceivable assurance can anyone have that they wouldn't wind up accomplishing the other? The foreigner can't tell; he can't hope to tell. Who can? There are millions of these people. They are the blind, furious energy that makes the whole immense machine whizz.

That is the problem with the *affaire* Mishima. Was his gesture directed against the new industrial Japan, or against the new peaceful Japan? Assume he meant it in as backward a way as one can imagine; the reaction his deed provoked is more complex than anything he could conceivably have intended. It has caused self-questioning in people for whom militarism is absolutely discredited and bankrupt. For them, it's a question of their own historic past, their identity as a nation; and we can hardly understand what an urgent question that is, without trying to imagine how the East-West dichotomy enters into every part of their lives. It determines the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the way they get around. (How can you wear a kimono and drive a car? there are places in Japan where it's against the law to try.) They are up against the question, not just as a people, but as individuals, every day of their lives. A trifle, but a significant trifle, the kind that rankles in a young person's mind: why are all the dummies modelling dresses in department stores—and not just dresses, kimonos—*gaijin* girls of wax, with blue eyes and blonde hair and busts *à l'américaine?* Isn't it considered acceptable, in the new Japan, to look like a Japanese? Already some Japanese have come to feel like immigrants in their own land, as if there were something uncouth about coming from the "old country," something discreditable about the old manners. Mishima struck out against these stereotypes of a civilization about which the Japanese people felt, perhaps, even more uneasy than he or they realized. He did so through the traditional Japanese gesture of a protest combined with a submission in an irrevocable act. His gesture was "pure" in the sense of defeating in advance all conceivable ulterior motives. It is a gesture that the history of Japan associates with the spirit of *bushido:* that is a war spirit, but it is also the spirit of the so-called "martial arts" in Japan, which are a cere-

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monious athletic exercise edging off into activities about as militaristic as the swinging of Indian clubs. Probably Mishima in his exalted, exhibitionistic hysteria dreamed of reviving the war spirit by his action, as it was revived by the hopeless coup of 1877, under the leadership of Saigo Takamori. But the ripples have spread far from where the stone of his intent fell. They have stirred currents that the old protest movements (now fractured and splintered beyond hope of communicating even with one another) couldn't dream of stirring. The student "revolts" have been contained, institutionalized: people laugh and say, in essence, "Well, it's their one chance to kick up—let them kick!" In all Japan one can't find as many people listening to bullhorns as will be found blatting over them; the revolutionaries simply can't make themselves understood. But most of the questions that Mishima stirred in the minds of people go beyond right-left formulations. Even the question of war and peace (if it were a real question, or became one) wouldn't be the same thing now that peace has proved itself so much more aggressive, and so much more efficient in its aggression, than war.

There is immense impetus in modern Japan; hitherto it has been mostly employed in reconstructing the country that 1945 left in a state of total collapse. All sorts of new projects are on the books: a bullet line north to Hokkaido, bridges across the Inland Sea, whole new industrial cities, superhighways. But they are all more of the same, and all dependent, like what has gone before, on the opening up of new markets abroad, on expansion. Precisely now, when some of that open room for expansion in the markets of the Americas and western Europe appears to be closing off, the whole question of whether that's the way they want to go at all has been placed before the Japanese people. For all their impetus, they are in a state of critical instability. The traditional Japanese way of solving problems is to incorporate both alternatives—emperor *and* feudal lords, Buddhism *and* Shinto, Western *and* Eastern ways, kimonos *and* miniskirts. The easiest option before them at this point, the one they seem to be thinking of more and more vigorously, seems to involve poising their immense Asian neighbor, China, against the long-nosed foreign devils from over the sea. One needn't talk yellow peril to see that under a loose slogan like "Asia for the Asians," Japanese industrial expertise and Chinese manpower could combine in ways that would solve some ego-problems and do interesting things to the face of the planet, as well.

Meanwhile, how are we to think sensibly of these matters when we can't so much as walk into a noodle-shop and ask for a plate of *soba* without inducing hysterical laughter in the proprietor? It was good-natured laughter, I guess; but it still rings in my ear, telling me (as if I didn't know) that in his world—such as it is; and it's the only one he knows or wants to know—I'm wrong, wrong, wrong. Not bad, just funny. Which in some ways is worse.

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JOHN SIMON

# Theatre Chronicle

As I look around the theatre this April, the best thing on the boards is barely a play at all. It is *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine,* Father Daniel Berrigan's own condensation, with some help from Saul Levitt, of the trial record of the famous draft-file-burning case, in which he, his brother Philip, and five other men and two women were convicted. The defendants in the Catonsville, Maryland, case did not in the least deny that they poured home-made napalm over a goodly number of draft files at the local draft board and set them on fire; they merely contended that it was better to burn paper than people, and that this gesture, besides being a kind of symbol speaking all civilized languages, actually made it harder to draft a fair number of young men. The judge, himself a Catholic (both Berrigans are Jesuit priests; the other defendants, Catholic laymen), wept when he had to condemn these men and women to rather stiff jail sentences. But that was the law, and it was not up to him, or anyone else, to disregard the law. Yet that was precisely what the Catonsville martyrs were after: to demonstrate the inhumanity of the Law, even if it meant losing years of their lives to accomplish it.

I have not followed the case closely, and cannot say how much rearranging the play required. A few explanatory speeches have been added, and very much had, of course, to be omitted; there are also changes of chronological order. But facts have not been altered or testimony rewritten, and the main point emerges gradually with increasingly powerful clarity: the actions of these nine people are based on a reasoning and language totally different from the reasoning and language of the Law (the capital letter seems painfully necessary). The prosecutor and judge might as well be talking Chinese to the defendants; and they, in turn, volapük at the Law. With the help of the defense counsel's questioning, the nine recount their past lives: how from artists, nurses, students, or missionary priests and nuns who gave up their orders when the Church interfered with their charitable work in Africa or Guatemala, they became slowly, almost reluctantly, but inevitably freedom fighters. How our support of inequity abroad alerted and sensitized them to injustices at home, until they could no longer endure in silence foreign and domestic malpractices whose crowning embodiment was Vietnam.

Over and over the judge keeps repeating that the government of Guatemala or Whathaveyou is not on trial here, that the defendant's parents' experiences in Nazi Germany are not relevant here, that the Church's restrictions on the Maryknoll order's reform work is not being tried here. Over and over the judge, more exasperated than hostile, wearily claims irrelevance and implores the defendants to get closer to

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the actual case, from which they seem to be straying many miles and years afield. But the defendants and their attorney keep affirming that the poverty and exploitation seen in remote places abroad, and in cities and hamlets at home, are relevant; that the deaths in Latin America and Africa and Asia, and their repercussions in human hearts, are relevant; that the meditations of priests and laymen about their priesthood and religion are relevant; that burning souls are as relevant as hands that burn documents. And later, when the jury is out, and the nine gather around the judge to try to reach him in basic human terms, they come very close to success, but finally founder on the Law: inflexible, immutable, inaccessible to mere common sense, humanity, horror of useless bloodshed. After all, couldn't every other infringer of the Law then argue that his conscience gave him the right, etc. etc.?

The play is staged by Gordon Davidson in a church, and there is something particularly poignant about a pulpit's becoming the judge's chair, a pew's turning into the jury bench. We are reminded that official religion (in this case Catholicism, but it could be any other) is on the side of the Law against its own saints (for that is what these nine are) as it always was. And Davidson has found a technique that lets testimonies blend aurally into one another even as the physical presence of one defendant on the witness stand is suddenly, in midsentence, superseded by another's: the same effect as a dissolve or a lateral wipe in the movies. This rapidity and fluidity suggests the length, the endlessness of the trial, as well as the seamless oneness of the eternal agon between the Soul of Man and the Law, that necessary robot policeman or Frankenstein monster man had to invent. Like any weapon or monster more powerful than its inventor, it may end up by destroying him.

This forthright, moving piece of documentary theatre reaches vast implications, sets up tremendous reverberations. Not only do we see that sainthood represents common sense far more truly than does the Law; not only do we see the failure of democracy in action, for these inspired men and women try every way of reaching the elected lawmakers of this land and fail, just as they fail in getting the silent majority on their side. The play takes us farther: to a clear view of the preposterousness of the *condition humaine:* these nine people acted out of brotherhood with all men, and it is their brothers who imprison them and decimate their days on earth. These nine speak out against the injustice of an unnecessary war, and only achieve the further injustice wreaked on them. These nine were particularly moved by the state of black men, and a black attorney represents the State against them. These nine achieved the wedding of compassion with passion, only to elicit the divorce of legal reason from human common sense. And we, all of us who allowed them to be arrested without coming to the defense of their courage and goodness, are powerless, pusillanimous, and guilty.

That is a terrible awareness, but the play makes us aware of some-

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thing even more terrible. That we are not, and probably never will be, citizens of one land. Not only cannot the people's will end this war—it is not even enough people's will to end it. From what the nine tell us, we sense how little serious opposition to the war and other forms of injustice there is around. And we feel vividly the victims of dual citizenship. Each one of us is living not only among his friends or friendly enemies with whom, despite disagreements that may not be all that friendly, he can still comfortably share the same world, breathe the same air. One is also, alas, a citizen of a realm of fools—or a ship of fools, heading for shipwreck—peopled by those with whom one has nothing in common, and of whom, with the best of intentions, one cannot say *humani nihil a me alienum puto. The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* happens to be well directed and well enough acted, but that is of no greater importance than whether it is, strictly speaking, a play or not. It is a shattering experience emotionally and intellectually: it glues itself to your brain and forces you to think about it. I doubt whether art—pure, certified art—can do any more or better.

The most interesting by far of the current "real" plays—those, at least, that are not revivals—is Christopher Hampton's *The Philanthropist.* Unfortunately, I don't know the 24-year-old English author's two previous plays, which sound, at the most modest estimate, interesting; the present one is lively, likable, intelligent and provocative, even if not devoid of flaws. It reveals a mind coming to grips with genuine problems, a mind at work even in the midst of smalltalk, and no matter if it is to some extent a collective mind, the mouthpiece of a culture: Oxford's, literary London's, England's. There is personal invention here, and a true concern for assessing the relation of the life of the mind to life in general, a subject seemingly beyond the capabilities of any American dramatist of comparable age.

The title is the key to the intention: the play is a pendant, a counterpart to Molière's *The Misanthrope.* Hampton's hero is Philip, a philologist-don at an unnamed English university in the near future. Philip knows himself to be boring by the simple fact that he bores himself; he remedies this as best he can by being inordinately nice and complaisant to everyone around him. He speaks, sees, and hears no evil, likes everyone, and is in all ways the opposite of Alceste. Whereas Alceste tells a bad poet just what he thinks of his work, Philip is able to make himself like a bad play a student reads to him. Whereas Alceste resists the overtures of Célimène's friend Arsinoé, Philip, out of sheer desire not to offend, yields to Celia's fellow student Araminta. Whereas Alceste wants to shun society, and so loses his beloved Célimène, Philip is desperately gregarious and so—here comes the switch—likewise loses his betrothed Celia: he invites over an impudent novelist who proves the straw that breaks the engagement's back.

For the point here is that excessive affection for humanity and utter contempt for it come, finally, to the same thing: you cannot live for

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people any more than you can live against them. But beyond that, the play questions the very possibility of human goodness. Through a number of narrated events outside the immediate purview of the stage action, we are given a picture of a world gone mad, in which every kind of assassination, political and even literary, flourishes; in which students become disgusted with what learning reveals to them and set fire to their apartments; and Philip, the good man himself, spectacularly lets down a beggar who has become dependent on him. Within the stage action proper, violence and absurdity likewise prevail. A student shoots himself bizarrely, and no one pays much attention to it. People drop into bed with perfect strangers for no particular reason and leave each other next morning perfect enemies. Worst of all, people, for one reason or another, dislike themselves. They may be as unself-confident as Philip, who says, "I am a man with no convictions—at least, I think I am." They may, like Celia, get engaged to a safe, staid fellow out of mistrust of their emotions. Or like Donald, Philip's fellow don, they may observe that there are two kinds of people, "those who live by what they know to be a lie, and those who live by what they believe falsely to be the truth," after which Donald cheerlessly numbers himself among the former.

It would be a world of total despair if its absurdity did not make it funny. The swinish novelist Braham Head is "one of those writers who has been forced to leave the left wing for tax reasons"; Philip the philologist specializes in silly anagrams with the rapid improvisation of which he entertains his friends; masturbation can be justified as "the thinking man's television"; seemingly fake guns go off and seemingly real ones do not. Those anagrams, it appears, are significant: everything can easily rearrange itself into something else, even its opposite: "I think there's nothing cruder than an excess of subtlety," the odious novelist remarks, and, indeed, *les extrêmes se touchent.* If Alceste made an enemy out of Oronte by faulting his sonnet, Philip angers a young playwright no less by awkwardly liking his play. If Alceste's jealousy annoys Célimène, Philip's lack of jealousy annoys Celia just as much. The man who is too soft on mankind produces no better effect on it than he who is too hard on it; in the end, "philanthropist" is just an anagram of "misanthrope," a reshuffling of ingredients that produces a different concept but the identical unhappy results.

The verbal anagram with which the play ends is Philip's discovery that "imagine the theatre as real" is an anagram for "I hate thee, sterile anagram," which suggests that Hampton considers the theatre a game of anagrams with reality, but a game that is ultimately sterile. Yet life itself is anagrammatic, too. The play (or life) ends with a visual anagram: a seeming toy gun, in the first scene, kills someone with no particular reason to die; the real-looking pistol in the last scene, with which we expect Philip to kill himself (he has lost three girls, including his fiancée, all in one day, and has been unwittingly

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betrayed by his best friend) proves to be a mere cigarette lighter. He has just announced that he is about to do something terrible, so we expect suicide. Instead, he lights a cigarette. But, anagram of anagrams, even cigarettes spell suicide, albeit in a roundabout, slower way.

Do not assume, however, that Hampton has only cleverness going for him—though he can cleverly sustain a funny idea for several lines of good repartee, witticisms topping one another, which is the sine qua non of the true comic dramatist. He can also write a good serious scene, such as the final parting between Celia and Philip, or, in another key, the painfully constrained colloquy between Philip and Donald in the closing scene. Neither love nor friendship works for Philip and his nonlovers and nonfriends, and these scenes, though still subtly comedic, are fraught with a grave pathos. In the end, Philip emerges, very much like Alceste, a comic figure with tragic overtones. Or, to put it more precisely, though the fanatic of scornful truth and the fanatic of goodwill and accommodation may be comic figures, the fact that their consistency damns them in the eyes of an inconsistent world is a kind of tragedy. Molière's play is an analysis of the nature and failure of honesty; Hampton's, very nearly, is an analysis of the nature and failure of goodness.

I say "very nearly" because, for all its aptness, the play is not quite so strong as it might be: the violent, absurdist world outside is not completely successfully integrated with the absurd little vehemences of Philip's seemingly somnolent world; Philip himself, though a good man, is probably too weak and ineffectual to embody a fully valid critique of goodness. Alec McCowen plays him with a barrage of brilliant little comic inventions: overachieving gestures, pauses panting for pregnancy, artful vocal diminuendos, looks that could melt a pound of butter on the spot. But these clevernesses are, at length, self-defeating: they invest individual moments with indisputable bravura, but they detract from easeful flow in the characterization, from attention to the core of personality. Jane Asher is quietly affecting as Celia, suggesting both the cynical coolness that might make a dazzling girl latch on to a stodgy do-gooder, and the very genuine melancholy that briefly pervades even such a clever young butterfly upon realizing that the comfortable old toadstool is no flower for her to suck. Penelope Wilton, who recreated the jolly nymphomaniacal Araminta here (like McCowen and Miss Asher, she had been in the London production), was unfortunately soon sent packing by a foolishly xenophobic Equity ruling. What a bouncy lump of overripe femininity was thus lost! As Donald, Ed Zimmerman, one of the more interesting young American actors, caught the essence of a decently self-doubting academic (as opposed to Philip's more crippling form of the malady) very deftly. Only Victor Spinetti, as Braham, was too obviously crass; and, in a small part, Paul Corum was quite deplorable. The sad thing is that, despite laudatory notices, the play is doing poorly, and may well have vanished by the time these further praises reach print.

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Edward Albee's new play *All Over,* confirmed what was rather more than a suspicion and somewhat less than a certainty: that Albee, after a bright, ephemeral spurt of playwriting, has played or written himself out, and can no longer be counted as an enlivening force in the American theatre. Except for *Zoo Story* and two thirds of *Virginia Woolf,* there is nothing in the Albee corpus that is both original and stageworthy, and, furthermore, has something to say. Three things about Albee have become progressively clearer. (1) His flair is for bitchy repartee of a predominantly homosexual sort, and his best writing occurs where two men, or a man and a woman who could be another man in disguise, have at each other. The last time this worked (more or less) was in the opening scene of *Tiny Alice;* since then, Albee has used it more clumsily or avoided it altogether. (2) If Albee, then, would stick to homosexual themes, he could be a useful minor playwright; but he wants to be a major, unparochial dramatist, which seems to lie well beyond his means. (3) But even at that he might be somewhat more successful if he did not so manifestly retreat from human experience. His cork-lined study (or is it an entire cork-lined apartment?) is an apt symbol for an isolation from human contacts and language, a sterile sort of alienation (there are also fruitful kinds) that has become more and more apparent and appalling in Albee's work.

*All Over* has a Great Man dying behind a screen in his living room, attended by the ancient family Doctor and a Nurse. Down front, on sofas and chairs, sit, lounge, reminisce and squabble the Wife, the Mistress, the Best Friend (also lawyer and, briefly, cuckolder to the Great Man), the Son and the Daughter. The pretentious capital letters are Albee's, not mine; the characters go only by these megalomaniacal generics that are supposed to add universality but merely subtract specificity on which universality could be based. Nothing happens while these Capital Letters endlessly divagate and occasionally lock in lackluster combat made up of feeble insults. There are a few second-rate observations about death; otherwise everybody recites endless arias—usually about his or her childhood, some remembered ancestor or other, or a long-past love affair. These divagations never coalesce into themes, nor are they very interesting in themselves. Furthermore, Albee is almost completely unable to give his characters distinctive ways of speaking: all of them sound exactly alike, and, worse yet, unlike any human being, only like Albee's ink bottle lucubrating away.

For Albee has painstakingly evolved a language that seems to flaunt its sounding more like nondramatic prose than drama. Thus one keeps hearing things like "he said" or "she thought"; "as it were" or "in a manner of speaking"; and various other bits of verbiage from the novelist's larder. "I mean at least two things, as I usually do," a character says, including instant editorial comment; or "I put my hand on the sill, if that is what car doors have"; or "Fucking, as it is called in public now by everyone . . ." The effect is to wrap the words in a kind

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of gauze, something Albee's already hazy language can ill afford. So we hear things like "The silences and the goings-on came later—the tightness was still engaged"; or "That is what I have come to love you so little for—that you love yourself so little"; or "He took to his bed—or was taken there—and stayed for thirty-one years" (little pedantries at the expense of idiomatic locutions); or "No man who has a mistress for his wife will take a wife for his mistress" (Wildean epigrams with the joke and the grain of truth taken out of them). When the Mistress happily recalls her one previous affair, when she was sixteen and her lover fifteen, we learn that their "sex was . . . strong, practiced and assisting," which is psychologically improbable and linguistically grey. She goes on about "a penis I could not dismiss from my mind when I was not with him," which merits a little scrutinizing. That it is more homosexual than heterosexual is unimportant. What is interesting is that it is intended as the most passionately erotic, loving, positive moment in the play, and yet isn't in the least loving or even erotic. It represents, in fact, a bankruptcy of language as well as of feeling. What sort of love is this, and what sort of emotion recollected in tranquillity, that latches on to mere genitalia and disregards all other features of the beloved? What would it say for any of us if all he remembered of an absent lover were a penis or a vagina? And if the best verbiage we could find to express that third-rate longing were as clinically detached as that? Well, after a couple of hours during which nothing more dramatic happens than an exchange of slaps between Mother and Daughter, the Great Man dies behind the screen, the Doctor announces that it is "All over" and we are free to go home and ponder the autobiographical implications of that phrase and title.

The acting of Jessica Tandy and Colleen Dewhurst, as Wife and Mistress, is creditable indeed when you consider that they do not deliquesce into the amorphousness of their parts. George Voskovec, as the oily Best Friend, James Ray, as the spinelessly hysterical Son, Madeleine Sherwood, as the spinily hysterical Daughter, and Betty Field, as an unduly orotund Nurse, manage to be even worse than their parts, and that, too, is a not inconsiderable achievement. Neil Fitzgerald, as the kindly, superannuated Doctor, is pleasant enough, and delivers the one almost overtly homosexual speech of the play with the proper ambivalence. John Gielgud has directed with all manner of arbitrary blocking and stylized posturings, but, I suppose, the play is a director's *pons asinorum:* no matter what you do with it, it ends up looking bad. Rouben Ter-Arutunian's set and costumes are of transcendent ugliness, and the set, moreover, is so designed as to dissipate much of the dialogue irretrievably in the cavernous wastes of the Martin Beck Theatre. Small loss, though.

The tiny Forum Theatre, the experimental stage of the Lincoln Center Repertory Company, came up with the best American play since its inception, A. R. Gurney, Jr.'s *Scenes from American Life.* Well, perhaps not quite a play. It is a series of brief or somewhat longer vi-

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gnettes of life in Buffalo during the recent past, the present, and the grim future in which America goes totalitarian. There is one character, Snoozer, who is present as a baby in the opening scene, and as a young man in the final skit; in between, he is merely mentioned from time to time, and in one sketch we hear of his death during the terrible clashes that await us. The play, as you will have gathered, does not proceed chronologically, but skips back and forth in time, so as to make clearer the roots of future evil in the past and present, and to fill us with a greater sense of loss when a still gracious though impractical bit of living is clearly doomed by a preposed vision of what came after.

Gurney, some of whose previous plays also exhibit an elusive, inconclusive fascination, here again mixes much that is very good with a lot that is deficient. Thus his recreation of American provincial life among well-to-do WASPs is redolent with the pangs of dying gentility; the absurdities of quietly smug prejudice; the incompatibilities between spouses, generations, or business partners—the characteristic decencies and indecencies of everyday life, all as neatly arranged and pressed as flowers in a sedulous botanist's herbal. But some of the shortest blackouts have a way of being both insignificant and precious, and the bleak projections into the future look rather like conventional stage alarmism, even though, heaven knows, they may be justified. What especially weakens these scenes is Gurney's inability to demonstrate conclusively that his Buffalo burghers (as solidly American as beefburgers) with all their conventional, petty shortcomings, are truly responsible for the enormity of the coming horrors—or, at least, more so than any other group of their fellow countrymen. Gurney, of course, may claim precisely that these people are no worse than any other crowd around today, but his limiting the focus on them inadvertently overstates the case against them.

Still, the good sketches are wonderfully suggestive of much that they leave unsaid. For example, an encounter group of friendly adults practices "sensitivity" under the watchful eye of a madly wholesome (and butch) female group leader. The most timid wife in the group becomes "it," whom the others are encouraged to do little things to. These little things quickly sprout from almost subliminal acts into soul-kissing with felonious intent, and, before you know it, pandemonium breaks out. This is both funny and slightly sinister, and, in good double-edged fashion, cuts both at repression and idiotic ways of counteracting it. In this, as in other skits, the ensemble acting is more homogeneous than one has ever seen it at Lincoln Center, and even such tried and trying company veterans as Robert Symonds, Priscilla Poynter and Elizabeth Huddle blended nicely into the tightly-knit interplay, whose rich texture was set by Martha Henry, James Broderick, and the gifted but sometimes irritatingly vocally mannered Christopher Walken.

Among the new plays, I can think of only one more worth mentioning, the unjustly short-lived *Slag*, by another 24-year-old English play-

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wright David Hare. The production at the Public Theatre was at least adequate, which should have been sufficient to win over audiences to an original, sparkling, though as yet undisciplined talent, brimming with cheerfully pessimistic iconoclasm. The play concerns the interaction of the three mistresses running an English girl's school into the ground. The head mistress is an amiable termagant with lesbian tendencies, another mistress is a militant virgin, the third is working-class but disguised, and multifariously available. There is much gamey fun, and a lot of funny gamesmanship. The pupils keep dwindling while the women philosophize, play emblematic pranks on one another, or try to make a bit of Sapphic love. Finally the last little Indian is gone, and the slag heap outside is growing, though the headmistress is still indomitably sanguine. The one teacher who became defiantly pregnant and left, comes back with that false pregnancy quite vanished, and the games continue. The plot outline suggests Ionesco, Pinter, David Storey; but most of the details, even entire scenes, are indebted to no one, and splendidly funny. Yet *Slag* failed swiftly, for all the genuinely larger meanings behind its fun, while *Subject to Fits,* a pretentious piece of pointlessness, does capacity business on a lower floor of the Public Theatre. This is Dostoyevski's *The Idiot* rewritten in surreal fashion by Robert Montgomery, a 26-year-old Yale Drama School student, vastly less mature than his English juniors. But this mystification, a formless blending of absurdist non sequiturs with the basic situations of the novel, has so delighted our reviewers and, with slavish emulation, their readers, that the Public Theatre intends to follow it up with another Montgomery bastardization, this time of *The Possessed.*

The only original musical of any consequence—though questionable merit—in a field of nostalgia-laden revivals and pseudorevivals (shows imitating the lunacies of past shows) is *Follies,* which, after a shaky start, has picked up enough second wind, through publicity and gushy word of mouth as well as enthusiastic magazine reviews, to make it handsomely in the nostalgia sweepstakes. The show has a cardboard embryo of a book by James Goldman about a Flo Ziegfeld-like figure who throws a quasi-posthumous party in his already half-torn-down theatre for all his pre-World War II stars and showgirls. The plot gradually focuses on two formerly friendly showgirls and their fellow-student boyfriends, who once formed a triangle within a square. At this strange reunion, their not very successful marriages are by way of getting cross-entangled and realigned. Yet except for some shadow-boxing, nothing happens. But even as the quartet acts out their present troubles, four other performers, representing their youthful selves, reenact scenes from their past. Similarly, ghosts of former showgirls and entire ghostly follies acts intertwine with scenes from the party, at which the aging performers go through their old numbers, or act out bits of imaginary, stylized autobiography. The stage is aswirl and awash with past and present, real people, former selves, named or just anonymous ghosts of bygone showgirls, singers, dancers, with pasty make-up and in

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black-and-white ghostly costumes, holding odd, showgirl attitudes in the background or even foreground, crisscrossing with real people, providing mirror images to dances by the living oldsters, sometimes even seeming to communicate across the decades or deaths that separate them from one another. It sounds interesting and confusing, and it is both, though mostly the latter.

There is a great deal of cleverness in Michael Bennett's choreography and in the staging he and Harold Prince jointly devised. Florence Klotz's costumes hover with shrewd campiness between lavish splendor and outrageous pastiche, while Boris Aronson's scenery is awesome in its towering, massive, yet kaleidoscopically shifting structures. Stephen Sondheim's lyrics are often pertinent and always polished; when they are soggy, we may assume that this is their parodic intent. Sondheim's music is mostly over-cerebral spoofs of the popular composers of the period, never happily outright parody, always cluttered up with an overlay of fussiness. Near the end, when all four principals are allowed to enact a production number, a mini-Follies of their own, through which they comment on their real or imaginary lives, *Follies* does come to brief though belated life. But this happens at the end of a very long, intermissionless evening, and the fun is quickly dampened by an ending in which both couples emerge from this *Walpurgisnacht* improbably chastened, mature, and together.

The concocters of *Follies* and the champions of the show vie with one another in denying its basis in camp and nostalgia. Instead, we are told about Proustian overtones, the New Plotless Musical, time as the sole subject matter, the Past as a metaphor for—I forget what, a Fellini phantasmagoria translated to the musical stage, and more such pioneering palaver. The truth, as I see it, is that some 800,000 dollars were spent on visual opulence, the digging up of old favorites of stage, screen and television, and a large cast of oldsters and youngsters whooping it up with agility or endearing arthritis all over an immense stage. The music and lyrics tend, however remotely and distortingly, to sound like the good (i.e., bad) old stuff; and to see venerable crones capering about, hear them belting out numbers announcing that they have survived everything from Franz Lehár to J. Edgar Hoover, such agelessness is equally irresistible to aging burghers and to pederasts who cling desperately to their youth. So, despite some up-to-date inventiveness, *Follies* reeks with nostalgia, and the epochal innovations claimed for it ring in my ears like the sound of protesting too much.

One thing, however, is unqualifiedly in the show's favor: the lean, tough, earthy, elegant resiliency and loveliness of Alexis Smith. Handsome but cold and unspectacular in her now almost forgotten movie career, Miss Smith, at 49, reappears as a singing and dancing stage actress of great charm and finesse, and as a woman of paradoxically mature as well as girlish beauty. There is something of a miracle in this, but you cannot be nostalgic about miracles: nostalgia feeds on repetition; miracles are unique.

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STEPHEN FARBER

# Sex and Politics

ELIO PETRI'S *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* begins with a pleasingly simple, provocative premise: on the very day that he is to be promoted from head of the homicide division to head of the political intelligence division, a deranged Roman police officer murders his mistress, leaves clues that will clearly incriminate him, and sits back waiting to be exonerated; his grisly experiment is designed to prove that the man in authority transcends the law. It is an outrageous premise for a parable, yet it touches just close enough to the news in yesterday's headlines to tease our imaginations. Through exaggeration and abstraction the film has the opportunity to raise some important philosophical questions about the relationship between law and justice, order and despotism. We expect to see Petri follow his premise to its logical, grotesque conclusion—a stinging demonstration of the invulnerability of the police in an increasingly repressive and intolerant society. A parable can be effective as long as it builds steadily in intensity; simplicity and clarity, not subtlety or complexity, are the qualities essential to the form. But the film is convoluted instead of straightforward. Petri does try for depth, even for psychological realism. Unfortunately, this makes hash of the allegory. What remains is one of the most confused films of the year.

At the start the chief seems to be in complete control of what he is doing. He may be insane, but his insanity is that of the fanatic or the demagogue; he is a *rational* madman, and remarkably intelligent. Every detail has been carefully worked out in his mind, made to fit his perverse master plan. For example, he deliberately allows himself to be observed at the scene of the crime by a young student revolutionary; he hopes that the revolutionary will later accuse him of the murder, for then his experiment will have a perfectly symmetrical conclusion—the evidence of the radical will automatically be discounted, for society will not allow the forces of anarchy to restrain the guardians of order. The scenes in which the chief harangues his colleagues about the need for greater political repression are wittily and ingeniously written, and Gian Maria Volonte plays them with great relish and power; the chief seems possessed, but, at the same time, such a brilliant strategist that we can imagine him taking command of his entire society. He is a classic movie villain, a sort of evil genius; and if the film had respected its own conceits, it might have been a disturbing melodrama about the evolution of a fascist dictatorship.

But something unexpected happens to the character of the chief. As the film goes on, instead of becoming more and more fanatical, he

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begins to lose control of himself, until he seems a victim of his own plot. While he plants more evidence that will point to his guilt, he also destroys evidence that is too incriminating, as if he is frightened of his scheme. At other moments he seems too anxious to be caught, punished and humiliated, more masochist than megalomaniac. And through a series of flashbacks that tell us more and more about his relationship with the woman he has murdered, we learn of insecurities that are hidden beneath his brutal facade.

Instead of extending its fantasy level, sharpening its metaphorical portrait of the invincibility of the police, the film turns into a clinical dissection of the chief's psychosis. For the metaphor to be effective, it isn't nesessary that we know a great deal about the chief's motivation for the murder. His obvious motive is disturbing enough; as he says, "I wanted to reaffirm in all its purity the concept of authority." He aims to convince his department that the policeman must have absolute power if he is to control political subversion within his society. In the fantasy that ends the film, he imagines himself presenting evidence of his own guilt to his superiors, and they tear it up before his eyes; encouraged by their duplicity, he gratefully declares his innocence, his supreme, *absolute* innocence.

This much of the film is clear and satisfying. But the flashbacks that detail the chief's relationship with his mistress are designed to expose an additional, *private* motive for the murder: he killed Augusta because she taunted his masculinity and made him feel inadequate. Unfortunately, all of Petri's emphasis on the background to the chief's crime calls attention to the outlandish, fantastic quality of the basic premise and makes us uncomfortable about accepting it. Psychological realism and fantasy don't mix; the case study and the parable undermine each other.

Petri doesn't seem to know quite what he's doing, and at times he resorts to glib Freudian cliches to hold the film together. The final flashback, in which Augusta enrages the chief by telling him that the young student radical is a better lover than he, represents the most facile kind of liberal daydreaming: the revolutionary is more potent than the fascist, and it is the fascist's envy of the revolutionary's virility that stimulates his repression. But in most of the other scenes of the film, the chief doesn't seem sexually inadequate; on the contrary, his virility and brutality are clearly what excite Augusta, the decadent, phony liberal aesthete. The film goes to pieces in the scene of the chief's interrogation of the revolutionary Pace. Pace stays aloof and superior, impervious to the chief's bullying. Shaken by Pace's contempt, the chief breaks down before him, turns into a whimpering child. But this destroys the characterization. For if the chief is such a pathetic, snivelling neurotic, desperately trying to reassert his wounded masculinity, he can't *also* be a threatening demagogue. And it is no longer possible to accept that bitter allegorical premise about the terrifying power of the police in a reactionary society.

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In a way, it's easy to understand and sympathize with Petri's dilemma. If he really followed his premise to its natural conclusion, the chief might seem too formidable a villain. In drama a diabolical character has genuine stature; one may hate and fear him, but one has to respect him too. Petri doesn't want to give the chief this kind of dignity; he cannot resist deflating him by dwelling on his sexual insecurities. Perhaps many of us have similarly mixed feelings about the police—we are simultaneously frightened of them and contemptuous of them, uncertain whether to regard them as deadly tyrants or ludicrous, hung-up bullies. But in an artistic work, especially one with the rigid requirements of allegory, this kind of ambivalence is apt to be crippling; a parable *demands* clarity, even if it necessarily sacrifices complexity. In trying for a more complicated and realistic point of view, Petri only makes us excruciatingly aware of the superficiality of his ideas. A narrower approach might actually have given the film more dimension.

It is not only the portrait of the chief that suffers from this ambivalence. Some of the images of the sleek, streamlined police station of tomorrow—for example, a gigantic basement filled with clerks monitoring the telephone calls of "subversives" with the latest electronic equipment, the myth of privacy mocked in this deafening, incoherent babble of voices—evoke an Orwellian nightmare world that seems only a subtle extension of the present. At other moments, however, the police are presented as such incredible bunglers that they can't even solve a simple murder case. It may be possible for an artist to deal with these contradictions and make them seem part of a coherent vision, but Petri has not found the right genre or the right tone; the contradictions in his film simply tear it apart.

But there are other evasions that make *Investigation* a peculiarly slippery movie. Petri is a film-maker who has always been drawn to kinky, perverse sexual relationships and to the chic style of aristocratic decadence. His last film, *A Quiet Place in the Country,* was an overripe sadomasochistic fantasy of a painter's fall into madness. In *Investigation* Petri revels in the visual details of Augusta's sybaritic apartment—the black sheets, the maroon gauzy draperies, the colored lamps and mosaics and screens. He cannot resist the thrill of her twisted relationship with the chief; he lingers over the scenes in which they play at reenacting famous murders, the chief propping her up on a toilet seat and stuffing money between her legs, or covering her body with phonograph records. I don't object to the glamorization of sadomasochism, only to the film's dishonesty: Petri tries to use his own love of opulence and decadence to expose the chief's sickness; the comment seems hollow because Petri is having too much fun with the scenes of perversion. The tension between his instinctive love of luxury and his sense of social responsibility makes him turn very moralistic. In *The Tenth Victim,* arguably Petri's best film (and coincidentally his most popular), he did find a way to use pop art decor and perverse sexual

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games as part of an incisive comment on the world of the future. But that film was a *satirical* fantasy; the light, insolent touch kept things in perspective. *Investigation* is too somber and shrill; humor alone could not have saved the film, but more of it might have helped. Since Petri is a skillful and talented director, the film is always absorbing and even, at odd moments, brilliant, but it just hasn't been thought out; trying to put it in order makes you dizzy.

Petri's private obsessions may account for some of the convolutions in *Investigation,* but it cannot be coincidental that so many other recent Italian films exhibit many of the same confusions. *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion,* Visconti's *The Damned,* Pasolini's *Teorema,* and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* are all movies by Marxist film-makers that are more notable for their lush decor and their twisted sexual relationships than for their political ideas. One expects Marxist movies to be spare and austere, but these are florid. The paradox that throws them out of control is that although they mean to condemn Fascist tyranny and celebrate the communal spirit of the working class, they are all obsessed with the luxury and decadence of aristocratic life. Even a much more meticulous theoretician like Pontecorvo shows, in his fascinating, underrated film *Burn!,* an infatuation with sensuous visual compositions that a more single-minded revolutionary film-maker might find self-indulgent.

The shared confusions in these movies probably reflect shared cultural influences—for example, a rich, decorative artistic heritage (closely tied to the upper classes), and the pervasive, enduring power of the Catholic Church—that Americans can appreciate only in a very superficial way. Over the years the work of older Italian film-makers has displayed some of the same tensions that we find in the newer films. The development of Fellini, one of the key figures in Italian cinema, and an influence on both Petri and Bertolucci, is particularly suggestive. From the early neorealist films, with their sympathy for the waifs and clowns of ordinary life, to the increasingly lavish, spectacular pageants of recent years, Fellini's work seems to summarize many of the contradictions inherent in Italian movies: the responsibility to populism, but the secret, then defiant attraction to aristocratic opulence and decadence; the ambivalence toward the Church, and the correspondent ambivalence toward sexual dissipation. (Bertolucci has said that he considers Rossellini the greatest of the older Italian directors, and it is fascinating that Rossellini too, though a more austere director than many of his contemporaries, has moved from the rawness and urgency of *Open City* to the loving recreation of seventeenth-century courtly style in *The Rise of Louis XIV.*)

We can recognize the contradictions in all of these films without really understanding them as instinctively as Italian audiences must; we don't *feel* the conflicting loyalties to aristocratic lavishness and

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Marxism that may make *Investigation* or *The Conformist* a very highly charged experience for Italians. In addition, Italian Marxism and Fascism have peculiarities that distinguish them from the textbook models of those ideologies we may have read about. We inevitably miss some of the nuances—and not just verbal nuances. Sophisticated Italian audiences probably apprehend subtleties in scenes that seem flat to us, and they may well find *Medium Cool* more bewildering than *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion.*

One of the things that distinguishes Bertolucci's *The Conformist* from some of these other films is that Bertolucci is more aware of his doubts and ambivalences, and he is able to make them function in a *conscious* way in his work—at least much of the time. The film is not entirely clear in its intentions. Some heavy didactic moments call attention to themselves—a Parisian flower seller singing the "Internationale" directly to the camera, the paid Fascist assassin muttering about the expendability of all "cowards, pederasts, and Jews" while he urinates. The film is much more than a stern anti-Fascist treatise, but moments like these are misleading and offputting. In addition, the Alberto Moravia novel that Bertolucci adapted—very loosely—sometimes imposes moral connotations that are almost the opposite of what Bertolucci is aiming for.

The Moravia book was a fairly straightforward case history of a Fascist counter-espionage agent. Although the film places less weight on the traumatic childhood experience that triggered Marcello's desperate hunger for normality—a seduction by a homosexual chauffeur that ended (apparently) with his shooting the chauffeur—that trauma still seems meant to clarify our understanding of the character, and it leads directly into the overly schematic conclusion. On the eve of Mussolini's fall, Marcello is walking through the streets of liberated Rome, and is startled and horrified to meet the homosexual chauffeur he thought he had murdered some twenty years earlier. Disoriented by the simultaneous collapse of his personal and political life, his respectable veneer cracks; at the final fadeout he is preparing to bed down with a young homosexual gypsy right out in the street. This loaded conclusion seems to suggest a neat equation between Fascism and repressed homosexuality that makes little historical sense. I don't think Bertolucci wanted this scene to be taken moralistically or even given disproportionate significance, but he has miscalculated its impact. Audiences have trouble keeping some subjects—like homosexuality—in perspective, and Bertolucci's slightly uncomfortable staging of this final seduction may add to the feeling that it is a lurid, melodramatic revelation. Perhaps a case can be made for the super-masculine militaristic ethos of Fascism as a mask for homosexuality, but Bertolucci hasn't even tackled that subject in *The Conformist* (Marcello is an intellectual and a bureaucrat, not a soldier), so the link between homosexuality and Fascism makes us uneasy.

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Though the ending contains a false symmetry, there is a good deal in the film to suggest that Bertolucci recognizes the complexity of the relationship between sex and politics. For one thing, the most sympathetic character in the film—the beautiful wife of the anti-Fascist professor Marcello is ordered to kill in Paris—is both a political radical *and* a lesbian. And even the final scene cannot be reduced to a simple message. When Marcello recognizes the homosexual chauffeur, he loses control of himself and accuses the chauffeur of being a Fascist agent; he even projects onto the chauffeur the murder that he had engineered for the state five years earlier. Marcello's urge to be "normal," to belong, is stronger than any specific political commitment. Once the dictatorship has fallen, he must repudiate Fascism if he is to survive in normal society; he now identifies the Fascist with the homosexual, for in 1943 the Fascist has become the social outcast. Homosexuality is not the key to Marcello's life, but simply the most striking *example* of his individuality, a defiance of the regulations of a well-ordered society. Homosexuality works as a metaphor for unconventionality. In the novel Marcello actually shot the chauffeur, but the film is ambiguous on this point, implying that he merely *fantasized* the murder as a way of camouflaging the homosexual experience; even as a child he intuitively understood that in his society murder was less of a stigma than sexual deviation. The film makes most sense neither as a dissection of Fascism nor as a case study of the Fascist as closet queen, but as an examination of the way in which *any* civilization demands the suppression of private impulses in return for the safety of normality and anonymity.

Marcello is an unusually complex Fascist, because although he is frightened of his abnormality, he is not comfortable with ordinary people either. In crowds he feels suffocated, and he is most often clumsy and unconvincing when he tries to play at respectable life. What gives the film its distinctive point of view—utterly different from Moravia's—is Bertolucci's voluptuous stylization of Marcello's abnormality. In contrast to Petri, Bertolucci is not hypocritical about his attraction to opulence and decadence; his love of visual luxury becomes part of the film's meaning, a way of expressing his commitment to art and imagination. Bertolucci intensifies and glamourizes all the bizarre, eccentric experiences of Marcello's life, and his baroque style makes even the relatively routine moments seem extraordinary. *The Conformist* is not really a political film at all; it is a poetic celebration of the romantic extravagances and idiosyncrasies of *private* life.

People who know the novel may think Bertolucci's elaborate high style cheapens Moravia's austere moral study; Stanley Kauffmann has already chided Bertolucci for obscuring Moravia's tale with his "stultifying pyrotechnics." But far from overwhelming the material, Bertolucci's self-conscious, luxurious style *transforms* the material into something richer, more complex and suggestive. *The Conformist* is a

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remarkable experiment in subjective filmmaking. The style unifies the work, even when the ideas are not fully controlled. It is a film of memory, beginning at dawn on the morning of the assassination. As Marcello drives with the assassin to the spot where the professor and his wife are to be murdered, he recalls some of the experiences that led to this climax. The memories are not in straight chronological order; the associations are freer than in conventional flashback-structured films. One memory will often touch off another, sometimes of an event that happened earlier, sometimes even of one that happened later. For example, during a flashback in which a friend promises to introduce Marcello to a high-ranking Fascist official, Bertolucci flashes forward to Marcello's subsequent meeting with the Minister. Scenes are broken off at illogical places; the transitions imply the *impatience* of memory, the ease with which one races over time in introspection.

Even more intriguing are the disorienting traces of fantasy within the individual memory images. At first we are only subliminally conscious of these distortions, but at the very end of the film, when Marcello meets the chauffeur we thought we saw him murder, we recognize that we have not been seeing a literal view of reality. This conclusion is shocking and dramatic, because it forces us to revaluate *everything* that has come before. The past recaptured is the past transfigured in imagination. The subtle, surrealistic distortions and exaggerations—for instance, the operatic way in which the murders in the forest are filmed—give unnatural significance to the past, convert it into a magical, fantastical dream. Bertolucci uses his camera subjectively, with great inventiveness. There are virtuoso shots in the movie that recall the wizardry of the young Orson Welles: a shot in which the camera moves up from the ground with the swirling dead leaves of Marcello's family estate capsulizes the sense of voluptuous decay that he now identifies with his upper class upbringing; another bewitching shot, moving slowly and imperceptibly out from the center of an expanding circle of dancers in a Paris dance hall, makes us *participate* in the growing exuberance of the dance and the sense of freedom and community that it represents.

There are original experiments with point of view. Anna, the lesbian (or bisexual) wife of his former professor, who hypnotizes Marcello while he is on his honeymoon in Paris, does not appear until the second half of the film; but Dominique Sanda, who plays the part, appears in two other minor roles earlier in the film—as a well-dressed woman whom Marcello discovers in the Fascist Minister's office, and as a prostitute he meets on the Riviera. Dominique Sanda is slightly disguised in these two scenes, and they are so brief that her face hardly registers on a first viewing of the film; but when Marcello meets Anna in Paris and tells her she reminds him of a woman he has seen before, we share the vague sensation of *déjà vu*. But there is another purpose to this casting trick. Marcello knows that Anna must die; he cannot

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offer her the future, but he *can,* in recollection, give her a little extra life in the past. Imagination frees Anna and Marcello from time. This is why when Marcello sees the prostitute on the Riviera he embraces her passionately and longingly; obviously this never happened, but Marcello cherishes his memory of this woman who foreshadowed Anna, and so he imagines their meeting with a dramatic significance it never had. When he does meet Anna, the two of them hardly exchange any words of greeting. From almost their first moment together they talk like bickering lovers. Again this is not a literal flashback of the meeting; Marcello is drawing out his courtship of Anna by intensifying even casual moments so that they count more in memory than they did in reality.

What makes the film exhilarating is the *pertinence* of all this breathtaking invention. *The Conformist* is a lyric that could not have been conceived in quite this way for any other artistic medium. The cinematic devices that Bertolucci employs so masterfully create a gossamer interior landscape, and heighten the sense of elegiac sadness. The film is a romantic lament for the extraordinary, privileged, irreducible moments of a man's life. After the murder of the professor and Anna, which Marcello watches from inside his car, there is an abrupt flash forward to the night of Mussolini's fall five years later. Marcello, his wife and daughter are listening to the radio in their dark, rather seedy apartment. Suddenly Marcello's life has been drained of mystery and poetry; the drab, colorless images of the family moving around the shabby apartment effectively illustrate the anonymity that Marcello has struggled so hard to achieve. The contrast between this scene and the rest of the film is sharp and disturbing. This abrupt, undramatic transition makes the scenes from the past—the charmed moments of Marcello's life—seem even more poignant. In spite of Marcello's compulsive desire to be ordinary, his mellow memories of his marriage and honeymoon show that he cannot quite suppress a sense of wonder at the marvelous, "abnormal" experiences of his life. Everything he is ashamed of—his mother's decadence, his father's insanity, his wife dancing a sexy tango with Anna, even that childhood seduction—seems enchanted and beautiful to us. Bertolucci's lyrical style—his painterly images and free form cutting, the romantic Georges Delerue music—exalt the richness and strangeness of interior life, the idiosyncrasies that defy any social or political theory of human behavior.

Some confusions remain, perhaps because of the very different emphasis of the Moravia novel, perhaps because of Bertolucci's own divided loyalties. The commitment he feels to the revolution works against his instinctive responsiveness to all the details of a man's experience that complicate his political identity. Without greater intellectual clarity and greater discipline, Bertolucci's work will be rough and imperfect; but the warmth and passion of *The Conformist,* added to its technical audacity, already place him in the very front rank of contemporary film-makers.

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B. H. HAGGIN

# Music and Ballet Chronicle

IN RECENT YEARS VIOLETTE VERDY has appeared in New York City Ballet productions with Peter Martins and Helgi Tomasson, whose expert partnering—in *Ballet Imperial, Swan Lake, The Nutcracker,* Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux*—has given her the security that has enabled her to operate with complete freedom and effectiveness, and who in addition have provided her performances with the enhancing contexts of their superb dancing. But the New York audiences have had few opportunities to see what Verdy described to Dance Society a year ago: the special working relation that she and Edward Villella have achieved in their years of performing together. It is in their engagements outside of New York that they have been giving their great performances together of Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux;* and it is of course outside of New York that they have had opportunities to perform in works not in the New York City Ballet repertory. It was in Boston that I saw them in *Giselle;* and in Washington, this year, that I saw them in the Bournonville classic, *La Sylphide.*

This work required Verdy and Villella to master—i.e. to feel at home in, and appear to be at home in—a style of dance movement and pantomine which was new to them, and which they were taught by a dancer famous for her performance in the title role, Elsa Marianne von Rosen. For Verdy the differences in the dance movements—as she described them in an interview with Selma Jeanne Cohen—were first their lightness, expressing the Sylphide's lightness of spirit that she said was timed into the music; and then the fact that "the hands are very soft, the elbows and shoulders . . . demure, and the head has all sorts of delicious angles." As for the pantomine, the gestures were those of a character charmingly irresponsible in her innocent wilfulness; and from my recollection of Toni Lander's performance I knew how difficult it was to make this character believable—how fatal to credibility "a false move, even just a misplaced accent" could be. And Verdy's achievement was not merely the dancing that she made enchanting with her lightness, with the softness of her hand movements, the demureness of her elbows and shoulders, the delicious angles of her head, but the flawless pantomine with which she made the Sylphide completely believable. For Villella the problem of the Bournonville style was what he described as the "little syncopations, little steps that have a slight difference in phrasing from the way we are used to doing them"; and what my eye noticed was the dazzling profusion of small leg movements and beats that he executed with precision and made as exciting as the powerful turns and leaps involving torso and arms,

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the powerful leg movements and beats, one usually sees him do. And his mining also compelled belief in the James one saw at the moment on the stage.

These two dancers performed in a context of excellent dancing by the soloists and *corps* of the National Ballet, with Andrea Price a charming Effie, Gerard Sibbritt an accomplished and amusing Gurn, and Frederic Franklin a striking Witch. The performance had stylistically harmonious scenic backgrounds designed by Robin and Christopher Ironside and obtained, I was told, from Ballet Rambert.

With the New York City Ballet a month later, when Verdy and Villella appeared together in the second of only two scheduled performances of Balanchine's *La Source,* he again made his physical power unobtrusive, using it to project himself about the stage with effortless grace and elegance in the intricate movements of his solos; Verdy, in her solos, again enchanted the eye with the subtle nuances of rhythm and inflection that are uniquely hers; and in their two *pas de deux* he added noble style to the skill with which he supported and presented her breathtaking unfoldings in arabesques and lifts. He also exhibited in these the deference that is a built-in stylistic feature of partnering; but at the curtain calls after the piece he chose to make an explicit personal gesture of homage to Verdy that was extraordinary and impressive in the mere fact of its being made, but acquired additional impressiveness from the manner of its making—its characteristic personal grace. Each time the curtain rose he kept his face turned to Verdy's as he brought her forward to the wildly applauding audience and as he stood holding up her hand in presentation of her to the audience to which she bowed; and only after she had turned to him and they had bowed to each other did he turn to the audience and accept applause for his own superb performance.

Villella spoke once of Verdy's "French flair" and gifts as a comic in pieces like *Western Symphony* and *Stars and Stripes;* and a few nights after *La Source* she illustrated his statement with humorous touches that pointed up the parodying Fourth Campaign of *Stars and Stripes.* (Such humorous touches also delightfully pointed up her performance in the Metropolitan Opera's production of *La Perichole* this year.) Villella, amusing in a uniform too big for him, added to the amusement with a swaggering hunching of his ill-clad shoulders.

The other dancer with whom Verdy has had a long-continuing relation is Nicholas Magallanes, who has danced with her in *Liebeslieder Walzer* from the beginning. He continues to be dramatically impressive in their dramatic duets in the first scene, and to give her secure partnering in her tremendous slow *pas de deux* and brilliant fast ones in the second scene; but support for her sustained lifts is something he no longer has sufficient strength to provide. And I imagine he would understand that instead of his continuing to make those lifts ineffective, someone else should provide the support for them he is no longer capable of.

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*Don Quixote* this year had important changes which shortened the first scene and combined it with the beginning of the second, so that it was in Don Quixote's study that Sancho Panza made his first appearance with a new funny little dance and armed his master. I regretted the loss of some of the omitted happenings—Don Quixote's feverish reading, and his imagined rescue of the little girl from her little attackers on hobbyhorses, in the first scene; in the second, his lunging with his spear at the shadow of the sword brandished by Sancho and then at the shadow of his own spear. I had been aware last year of Kay Mazzo's inadequacy for the third-act ballet with its climactic lifts; but this year I realized how ineffective she was even in the marvelous first-act solo with shepherdess's staff, the second-act dance with Don Quixote. (One noted that Clive Barnes—who two years earlier had found Suzanne Farrell's departure from the company unregrettable, and the dancers who replaced her preferable, praising Mazzo for avoiding in *Symphony in C* "the stylistic mannerisms of her predecessor . . . who here had an overfondness for kissing her knee"—wrote this year after *Don Quixote,* as though he had never written anything different, that Mazzo "lacked that effortless quality of perfect line that was Miss Farrell's", whom "no one will be able to replace . . . while her memory is still green.")

A second look at Balanchine's new *Suite No. 3* calls for mention not only of Peter Martins's beautiful performance with Gelsey Kirkland in the concluding Theme and Variations, but of the changed lighting which toned down the red that had made the set garish and obtrusive.

As for the remaining new works of the fall-winter season, the first, John Clifford's *Kodály Dances,* to Kodály's *Galánta* and *Marroszék Dances,* was a hodge-podge of gypsy-dance clichés that lacked continuity and direction from one moment to the next and at times looked as if they were being burlesqued. Then, in place of the originally scheduled *Goldberg Variations* of Jerome Robbins, which illness prevented his completing, there were Richard Tanner's *Concerto for Two Solo Pianos,* to the Stravinsky music with that title, basically an exercise in the Balanchine idiom and style, but with original twists here and there, that worked with the music and was pleasant to look at; and Lorca Massine's *Four Last Songs,* to the Strauss pieces, in which one saw a desperate straining for the unusual in the contorted poses and movements that made no sense individually or in sequence and had no relation to the luxuriant music.

One sympathized with the dancers whom Massine so misused; but there was far greater reason to feel compassion for the members of Maurice Béjart's Ballet of the 20th Century who performed in the ballets of his I saw at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—*Choreographic Offering, Nomos Alpha, Actus Tragicus, Le Sacre du Printemps* (an outrageous misuse of Stravinsky's score), and the two *pas de deux* for Suzanne Farrell, *Erotica* and *Bach Sonata*—which revealed Béjart as a

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choreographer with great pretensions and only slight gifts. It was the younger, lesser dancers of the New York City Ballet who were victimized in the Massine piece; whereas in the Béjart goings-on it was the astounding Paolo Bortoluzzi and other matured dancers of high quality. And it was Farrell whom one saw Béjart unable to do anything with, after the marvelous things one had seen Balanchine do with her.

A gala of the Garden State Ballet in Newark gave me an opportunity to see Verdy for the first time in the Fokine *Les Sylphides,* in which, not unexpectedly, the sequences in the great *pas de deux* to the C-sharp minor Waltz were made breathtaking by her subtleties of inflection and rhythm. Her partner was Conrad Ludlow, who gave his lyrical solo the beauty of continuous line it called for. And two lesser members of the New York City Ballet, Christine Redpath and Marjorie Spohn, produced amazingly accomplished performances in Balanchine's *Symphony in C.*

Also, in a guest appearance with the Boston Ballet Verdy and Villella added to *La Source* their delightful performance in Balanchine's *Donizetti Variations,* which hadn't been seen for years. And the improvement in the Boston company that was evident in this piece was even more striking in a performance of Balanchine's *Serenade* with the company's own soloists—Anamarie Sarazin, Jerilyn Dana and Edra Toth.

Years ago, though I missed what they communicated to a Japanese audience, I could feel the compelling power of the stylized movements of the Azuma Kabuki Dancers in their mask-like make-ups and sculptured costumes; and I expected to be affected in a similar way by the work of the Kerala Kalamandalum Kathakali Company at Hunter College. But I found that the differences—above all the profusion of small movements of hands and fingers in what evidently was a rich vocabulary of communication, but a foreign language to my eye—made it less effective for me than the Kabuki Dancers had been.

In 1954 Boris Kochno published in France *Le Ballet,* in which 150 pages of text and superb photographs were devoted to the productions of Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes: and it was natural for me to think that Kochno's *Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes,*[1] published here this year, was an English translation of those 150 pages with the same photographs. Instead it turned out to be a newly written book, with information about each of the Diaghilev productions from *Le Pavillon d'Armide* in 1909 to *The Prodigal Son* in 1929, and with different photographic documentation that was inferior and inadequate. This was most evident and important in connection with the early ballets in which Nijinsky appeared: as against the numerous exciting photographs of him in *Le Ballet* there not only are fewer in *Diaghilev* but they are less well chosen, less well reproduced, and in some instances

[1] DIAGHILEV AND THE BALLETS RUSSES, by *Boris Kochno.* Harper & Row. $35.00.

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reduced excessively in size. Thus, whereas *Le Ballet* had two photographs of him in *Scheherazade, Diaghilev* has none; it has only one very small one of him as Petrushka, as against the two large ones, and the ones of him with Karsavina and Bolm, in *Le Ballet;* only two very small ones of him as the Faun, as against the superb large one in *Le Ballet;* one large and one very small one of him in solo poses in *Le Spectre de la Rose,* and one of him with Karsavina in which they are very tiny, as against the large one of him in a solo pose and the four good-sized ones of him in action with Karsavina in *Le Ballet* (and the famous Cocteau drawing of the backstage scene after *Le Spectre* is so tiny that one cannot make out Nijinsky's face). In this most important respect the book is a great disappointment.

When I referred a year ago to Marilyn Horne's as the most beautiful female voice, and her use of it as some of the greatest singing, of today, I momentarily forgot about the beautiful voice and great singing of Janet Baker, which her Hunter College recital this year served to remind me of. It is a more delicately lovely and flexible voice than Horne's; and much of the time the great singing—in the songs of Debussy and Fauré, for example—is a quiet flow of tone with subtle inflections in which one hears the operation of extraordinary and unerring musical intelligence and feeling and taste. But it is a voice capable of the physical power for the emotional or dramatic intensity of music like *"Parto, parto"* from Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito,* whose phrases were superbly shaped by the same musical intelligence, feeling and taste. An additional gift for, and relish in, comedy was revealed in Schubert's *Die Männer sind méchant;* and, at the end, a command of the special style of the opening melodic writing of *"Non più mesta"* from Rossini's *La Cenerentola,* and of the bravura style in the later accurately executed florid passages.

As it happened, Horne provided a notable demonstration of her powers only a few days later, at a concert of the New Jersey Symphony under Henry Lewis in the Carnegie Hall Visiting Orchestras series. The second half of the program was devoted to passages from the first two acts of Berlioz's *Les Troyens,* subtitled *La Prise de Troie,* in which Horne sang Cassandre. These are the less interesting acts of a work which is not, as has been claimed recently, Berlioz's greatest masterpiece, and only rarely attains the incandescent beauty of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Les Nuits d'Eté;* but one knows one is hearing the assured operation of a great master. Certainly the audience at the concert knew this: it showed clearly, even when Horne wasn't singing, that it was engaged and affected by that idiosyncratic operation in music that was unfamiliar, that didn't have the immediate appeal of the beauty of the familiar early masterpieces, that was not being performed with especial heightening effectiveness by the orchestra and conductor. And there was no doubt that the prolonged demonstration

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at the end was a response not only to Horne's overwhelming singing, but to the extraordinary music she had sung in—which made the concert a remarkable occasion.

A week later Horne sang with delightful effect in the very different style of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* at the Metropolitan, and could be faulted only for a varied repetition of a section in her first aria that went far beyond any recognizable relation to the original. Figaro's entrance aria is traditionally an invitation to exaggerations and interpolations that Sherrill Milnes didn't resist; and in the second-act duet with Rosina he was unable to repeat accurately the little florid phrases of hers that he was supposed to repeat; but for the most part he used his fine baritone voice well. On the other hand Enrico DiGiuseppe's tenor not only couldn't manage the florid passages in the first act but was unattractive to the ear in its upper range.

As for the Metropolitan's new *Fidelio,* Florestan's dungeon is supposed to look as ruinous as it did in the production designed by Boris Aronson; but I don't see any justification for this appearance of crumbling ruin in the scenes in front of the Jailer's lodge and in the courtyard of the prison. And I question the German-Nazi-like uniforms and caps of Pizarro and the soldiers—especially since Don Fernando appeared in the final scene in eighteenth-century costume. There have been far worse things in the productions of the Bing era; but these were disturbing and distracting enough; and I should mention that they were decided on jointly by Aronson and the stage director Otto Schenck.

The Leonore in the performance I attended, Hildegarde Hillebrecht, sang well in everything but what is most important—the great recitative *"Abscheulicher!"* and aria *"Komm' Hoffnung",* for which she lacked the power of voice and style they require. But one heard great singing by Jon Vickers in Florestan's *"Gott! welch' Dunkel hier";* Edith Mathis's lovely light soprano in Marzelline's aria; good singing by John Macurdy, the Rocco, and William Dooley, the Pizarro. Regrettably one did not hear this singing in a whole created by great conducting: Böhm's pacing included going from the trio to the concluding section, in the first scene, with no change from the *Allegro ma non troppo* of the one to the *Allegro molto* prescribed by Beethoven for the other—which is to say, with none of the dramatic urgency and excitement in the concluding section that Beethoven intended.

The tenor DiGiuseppe turned up again as the King in the New York City Opera's production of Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera,* in which his voice was outclassed by those of Gilda Cruz-Romo (Amelia), Patricia Wise (Oscar), Louis Quilico (Renato) and Lili Chookasian (Ulrica). The Verdian tension and power were lacking in the orchestral context—in some degree, possibly, because of the orchestra's insufficient size, but essentially, I suspect, because they were not in Rudel's conducting. (I once heard them achieved with a much smaller and less

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competent orchestra by a young conductor, Vincent La Selva, who had a remarkable feeling for the Verdi style and would undoubtedly have produced a hair-raising performance of *Un Ballo* with the New York City Opera.) It was a relief to see scenery of the normal kind, designed by Eoin Sprott, and staging by John Hirsch that included only a few dispensable innovations—e.g. a dead man being taken down from the gallows before Amelia's arrival. But dramatic illusion was impossible with an Amelia who, when she moved on the stage, did so with the itty-bitty steps of a little girl.

I can express gratitude without the slightest reservation to the Juilliard School's American Opera Center for the production of Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* that provided an opportunity not only to hear the beautiful music sung well by the student soloists and chorus with the excellent student orchestra under Bruno Maderna's assured direction, but to do so undisturbed by what I saw: singers in rich eighteenth-century-Roman costumes designed by Hal George deployed with remarkable skill by Osvaldo Riofrancos on a permanent set of platforms and columns admirably designed by John Scheffler—with not a trace of the updating that has afflicted the staging of operas of the past in recent years.

The program of a Boston Symphony concert I attended in Philharmonic Hall exemplified ideas about program-making that Michael Tilson Thomas had described to an interviewer earlier in the season—the idea in particular, as I recall it, that programs should be made more varied, and in this way more interesting, with works for groups of different sizes and varying composition. It had occurred to me when I had read this that the audience was entitled to demand that such works be performed only if they were worth attention as pieces of music; and this thought recurred as I sat listening to Mr. Thomas' demonstration of how Bach could be boring with a small group of strings, winds and drums in his Suite No. 4 (but not in Nos. 2 and 3, which is why they are performed and No. 4 is not); how Schönberg could be boring with the entire orchestra in his Five Pieces Op. 16; and how Stravinsky could be boring with a small group of winds, percussion, solo string quintet, cimbalom and four singers in what my guest characterized as the "whimsy-whamsy" of *Rénard.* Only after these did Mr. Thomas perform something unusual that deserved the audience's attention—Act 3 of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake.* And only then were the extraordinary powers he had wasted on the earlier pieces employed in music worthy of them, producing a performance that was literally stunning not only in its tonal beauty and brilliant execution but in its unfailing musical rightness and the effect it gave to Tchaikovsky's marvelous writing in all its variety.

It occurs to me now that the variety Mr. Thomas wants doesn't require orchestras of different sizes: it can be achieved with composers' varying use of essentially the same orchestra. At the concert I attended

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Mr. Thomas could have achieved variety interestingly by playing first the act from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and then Stravinsky's ballet score *Le Baiser de la Fée,* his *hommage* to Tchaikovsky, in which he elaborates fragments from Tchaikovsky's piano pieces and songs in contexts of his own invention in what amounts to a fascinating Stravinskyan extension of the Tchaikovsky style, producing the most beautifully made, the most expressive, the most affecting of Stravinsky's post-*Sacre* works. But even without the special relation of the two works in this example, the variety Mr. Thomas wants is exhibited by the different ways in which Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Strauss, Mahler, Debussy, Stravinsky and Prokofiev use the symphonic orchestra.

The Munich Chamber Orchestra, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, turned out to be a well-sounding string group which, under Hans Stadlmair's direction, produced good performances of a Handel concerto grosso and Bach's D-minor Concerto for two violins, with two of the orchestra's violinists as soloists. But the wind-players added for Mozart's Piano Concertos K. 414 and 488 were not of first quality. Christoph Eschenbach, whose recorded performances of Mozart sonatas articulate the music with cohesive tension as well as delicate sensitiveness, exhibited in the concertos the same cohesive tension in powerful playing which occasionally produced unpleasantly hard tone.

Misha Dichter began his recital at the Metropolitan Museum with a sensitive performance of a Haydn sonata that would have benefited by stronger playing. Then he offered a work I hadn't heard since the twenties, Schumann's Sonata Op. 11, whose best writing, in the first two movements, Dichter performed effectively with plasticity and warmth.

Alicia de Larrocha, at Hunter College, also played a work that hasn't been heard much in recent years, the Busoni piano transcription of Bach's Chaconne for unaccompanied violin, which perverts Bach's piece into an occasionally thunderous pyrotechnical display of piano virtuosity that shouldn't be played at all. It gave the recital an old-fashioned character; and even the performances of other music by Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt, which were musically impressive, had moments that took one back to the virtuoso recitals of fifty years ago, which held audiences spellbound with displays of manipulation of the piano, some of it in the endless doodling of Schumann's Allegro Op. 8 or the endless rambling of his Novelette Op. 21 No. 8 that de Larrocha played.

Van Cliburn continues to give overwhelmingly great performances of the few great works he plays; and far from overwhelming the reviewers, he continues to elicit their condescension and denigration. His tremendous performance of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata was characterized by a reviewer in *The San Francisco Chronicle* as a "miserable reading . . . plodding, coarse, dull and totally without direc-

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tion"; and it was the same performance, if I remember correctly, that occasioned the contemptuous dismissal by a reviewer in *The Boston Globe*. These were assistant reviewers, who were echoing what the first-line writers have established about Cliburn not just in San Francisco and Boston but in New York. In a performance of Beethoven's Concerto No. 3 with the Philadelphia Orchestra this year he produced grandly impassioned and powerfully sculptured playing in which every note assumed the place allotted it in the emerging shape by a mind unfailing in its conceptual grasp of that shape and its control in achieving it. And his reward was Winthrop Sargeant's statement in *The New Yorker:* "I have admired Mr. Cliburn in the past for certain sensitivities to the Romantic style, and he is assuredly an able pianist. But his solo in this work was somewhat fussy, and, in the slow movement, almost unbearably spineless. I have always been an advocate of the Romantic style in rubato, but there is a limit beyond which simple incoherence sets in, and I think that Mr. Cliburn passed this limit."

The first of the two parts of Martin Cooper's *Beethoven: The Last Decade*[2] deals with the happenings in Beethoven's life in that decade; the second part with the works he produced in it. I understand Cooper to believe that a knowledge of the happenings is necessary for appreciation of the works; but actually he shows no connection between them. The biographical material is interesting, of course; but the valuable material of the book is the guided tours through the individual works in which Cooper points out what he thinks the reader should be made aware of. He is a perceptive guide; and the material will enlighten the reader who is able and willing to read it in the context of the printed scores of the entire works: I know nothing better than the account on pp. 365-6 of what happens in the coda of the variation movement of the Quartet Op. 132 and the effect it produces. But having said that I must mention a couple of rather amazing failures: the description of the texture of the Prelude to the *Benedictus* of the *Missa Solemnis,* on pp. 263-4, with not a word about the rapt atmosphere it creates that makes this the greatest moment in the work; and the argument objecting to the *Benedictus* itself, described correctly as "a complex scene of idyllic rapture", on the ground that it is an intrusion of theater into a liturgical work. I should mention also that Cooper has a discursive mind unchecked by a sense for value or congruity, which leads him to incessant quotation of what for the most part—e.g. statements by von Bülow—isn't worth quoting, and to see analogies everywhere which often are as dubious as the one in this concluding statement about the Scherzo of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata: "A wispy reminiscence of the scherzo's opening capers across the state for a moment, makes three short bows and disappears in the wings, rather like the Moorish boy in *Der Rosenkavalier.*"

[2] BEETHOVEN: THE LAST DECADE 1817-1827, by *Martin Cooper*. Oxford University Press. $12.75.

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One knew with Stravinsky, as one had known with Toscanini, that there would have to be an end; but miraculously the tiny, frail body continued to withstand the attacks of illness, and the powerful mind remained entirely unaffected by them. That was the difference: Toscanini's life had really ended, for him and for us, three years before his death, when he had been compelled to stop conducting; but the prose writing with which Stravinsky delighted those who found nothing to interest them in his recent music continued—with no lessening of intellectual force, personal vitality, verbal felicity and pungency—almost to the last moment of consciousness. In February there was an ostensible "Rap Session" with *The New York Review of Books* in which Stravinsky commented with his usual perception and humor on the general New York scene before getting to the new Boulez recording of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. He found the performance stylistically questionable because of its overaccentuation and overarticulation, its substitution of *forte* for *pianissimo*. But for this opera in which diction was a decisive element he considered the main problem to be the French of the non-French-speaking singers. For one thing, their accents and mispronunciations had the effect of attracting too much attention to the words—which led him to exclaim: "And what words! How could Debussy, the friend of Mallarmé, stomach Maeterlinck, let alone underline some of his most irritating mannerisms?" And he pointed out with examples that the singers' defective diction changed the written rhythmic values of what they sang. "But enough. What beautiful things the score contains!" he said, only to add that "my impression of the musical whole is of a decline in effectiveness after the *'Hair'* scene," and that the idiom of the work, "like a drug, wears off with time"—which raised the question whether this idiom was "a too confining one for an opera of this length," in whose later scenes "simplicity and restraint turn into limitation and constraint, beautiful monotony into just plain monotony." It is saddening to think that this is the last of such reports of what that ear and mind discovered in the music he went back to listen to in recent years.

And only a few weeks before his death he wrote a letter to *The Times* (published as inconspicuously as possible on a back page of the Sunday theater section) which began: "Clive Barnes's 'This Firebird Is For Burning' adds several cubits to the stature of his incompetence as a commentator on ballet." Mr. Barnes's dismissal of Stravinsky's criticisms of the original Fokine ballet with the statement "This was Fokine's ballet, not Stravinsky's, and Fokine knew best," led Stravinsky to write:

> . . . How can Mr. Barnes decide that Fokine knew better than I did, not knowing what I knew? And anyway, knew *what* better? I was at least there, I worked with Fokine. And I had been brought up on ballet since early childhood, hence may have had as keen apprecia-

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tion of it as Mr. Barnes. And though this is boasting, I had a reputation with the dancers for a choreographic imagination. Finally, my letters, which are now being prepared for publication (and may this be the last addition of the sort), bear out my later criticisms in concrete terms. Not that any of this proves that Fokine did not know best, of course, but it certainly weakens Mr. Barnes's claims to know.

And later Stravinsky referred to Mr. Barnes's "facile reviews and the way they oscillate between the 'rave' for one kind of mediocrity and the 'roast' for another." Thus Stravinsky's last public act was another of his attacks on reviewers in which, though he spoke on his own behalf, he spoke also for those who fear to speak out for themselves—the Verdys, Villellas and Farrells, the Cliburns, Ashkenazys and Michael Rogerses—who in addition to all they have to endure in their working lives to give us their great performances, must endure in silence the irresponsible and damaging nonsense that editors allow to be written about those performances by the Barneses, Schonbergs and Sargeants. With this last action, as I said of an earlier one, Stravinsky earned the gratitude of his fellow artists and the admiration of us all.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

# Here Today: A Poetry Chronicle

POUND ONCE WROTE: "No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and *cliché,* and not from life. . . ."

Again: "Poetry is a centaur. The thinking, word-arranging, clarifying faculty must move and leap with the energizing, sentient, musical faculties. It is precisely the difficulty of this amphibious existence that keeps down the census record of good poets."

Further: "Don't imagine that a thing will 'go' in verse just because it's too dull to go in prose."

Further still: "When you have words of a lament set to the rhythm and tempo of *There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night* you have either an intentional burlesque or rotten art."

And then: "Poets who are not interested in music are, or become, bad poets. I would almost say that poets should never be too long out of touch with musicians. . . . I do not mean that they need become virtuosi. . . . It is perhaps their value that they can be a little refractory and heretical, for all arts tend to decline into the stereotype; and at all times the mediocre tend or try, semi-consciously or unconsciously, to obscure the fact that the day's fashion is not the immutable."

Finally, anent the types of verbal clarity: "There is the clarity of the request: Send me four pounds of ten-penny nails. And there is the syntactical simplicity of the request: Buy me the kind of Rembrandt I like. This last is an utter cryptogram. It presupposes a more complex and intimate understanding of the speaker than most of us ever acquire of anyone. It has as many meanings, almost, as there are persons who might speak it. To a stranger it conveys nothing at all."

I am not sorry to quote Ezra Pound at such length. As far as I have served any master during my thirty years' apprenticeship in poetry, he has played the part, and I have never tired of returning to the best of his critical writing, so pointed and spirited, so deeply instinct with formative energy. Wherever I find it I always enjoy it. So do other readers, I know. But at present I have a separate reason for wishing to buttress myself with Pound's authority, for now I feel obliged, actually impelled against my natural desire, to say something that many people will think heretical and stupid, and in doing so to tread on a few toes. My strategy is to disarm these people by quoting to them from texts which they, too, acknowledge as originative, so

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that they may listen to me without offense. Yet isn't the truth simply that I think these people have paid scant heed to what Pound actually thought and wrote, and that offense is probably inescapable? So much the more reason to have no taste for it, then. The older I get the less I wish to tread on *anyone's* toes, certainly not for poetical reasons—politics being another matter. As Pound also remarked, "Beauty is difficult," damned bloody difficult, and the one aspect of his critical method which I somewhat disparage is his hauteur toward other writers, especially from his own generation, who were working at it as hard as he was. Let me try to do what I must without hauteur.

If what I have suggested is true, namely, that some of Pound's present-day followers accord his teaching more hebetude and neglect than real understanding, this is not the first time. We know what became of Imagism in the years following the first Imagist anthology in 1912: hordes of unfavored vers-librists, mostly Americans, crashed the gate, many under the flowing standard of Amy Lowell, which caused Pound to say that the movement had degenerated into Amygism, and caused both him and his friend Eliot to revert to the corrective traditionalism of *Mauberley* and the Sweeney and Hippopotamus poems. Pound and Eliot are no longer able to apply the corrective; yet I am certain it is coming from someone, somewhere, somehow, because the condition of poetry today resembles closely the condition of poetry in 1915. The common American poetic style, descended lineally if deviously from what Pound proclaimed in his Imagist manifestoes, has become again so common that it is ridiculous; riddled with triteness, sameness, and dullness. It is being turned out virtually by rote at tens of thousands of writing tables all over North America, and given to us, thrown at us, in poems which are interchangeable, in books whose authors, relentless ego-tripping solipsists though they are, remain as indistinguishable as the obit-writers of the *Times*. The tricks, metaphors, cadences, topics, vocabularies: they are standard. "Procedures," as Pound once complained, "are already erected into rules!" We have "syntactical simplicity" by the yard, conveying "nothing at all." I do not mean that there are no good young poets. There are a fair number, and I have praised them, publicly and privately, whenever I could; there would even be enough to sustain this particular "heave," as Pound would say, for years to come. The trouble is that in order for the good poets to sustain themselves, at least in the public or cultural sense, they must be able to offer their work clearly, freely, and with a certain distinctiveness and purity. Today the work of our good young poets is in danger of being swamped by the mass of similar but inferior writing. And the danger is heightened by the fact that many of the inferior writers have worked themselves into positions of power, since a sign of flatulence in any particular poetic movement is its concomitant institutionalization within the structures of academic and literary life.

We are accustomed to think of poetry as sustained by its leaders,

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because this is the case during periods of innovation when we are all caught up in the sociological dynamism of literary processes. But at other times, just as important in terms of art, when matters of principle are abeyant and each of us turns to the exploitation of his personal capacities, then we are all, leaders and followers alike, sustained by the health of poetry-at-large; or, conversely, let down by its weakness.

But my interest now is poetry itself, the lines that lie on the page and sound in the ear, and I hope my interest agrees with Pound's sense of the perennial needs: for craft, for understanding of technique, for honest serious work, and against carelessness and imprecision. Great poetry is another matter. We know little of its origins, and nothing at all of how to predict it. But poetry that can serve us, as farming and artisanship serve us, poetry that does not smudge its standards, poetry that by the very tension of its striving confutes the recurrent social philosophies of expedience and claptrap: this is what we are looking for. I remember a couple of years ago a good friend of mine, who is also one of our most prominent poets, showed me a new poem in manuscript. I read it, and then read aloud the first seven or eight lines, to show that their language was flat and prosaic. "Ah," was the response, "but you don't understand my prosody." Whereupon the same passage was reread aloud to me, with exaggerated pauses at the end of each line. "Prosody be damned," I said. "Prosody alone doesn't make poetry. And language that is lifeless, syntax that is dead, cannot be vivified merely by typographical division: that's nothing but elocution. If the poetic line means anything, it must mean more than that!"

Here is a paragraph for general inspection:

*Summer Morning*

I love to stretch like this, naked on my bed in the morning; quiet, listening. Outside they are opening their primers in the little school of the cornfield. There is a smell of damp hay, of horses, of summer sky, of laziness, of eternal life. I know all the dark places where the sun hasn't reached yet, where the singing has just ceased in the hidden aviaries of the crickets—anthills where it goes on raining—slumbering spiders dreaming of wedding dresses. I pass over the farmhouses where the little mouths open to suck, barnyards where a man, naked to the waist, washes his face with a hose, where the dishes begin to rattle in the kitchen. The good tree with its voice of a mountain brook knows my steps. It hushes. I stop and listen. Somewhere close by a stone cracks a knuckle, another turns over in its sleep. I hear a butterfly stirring in the tiny soul of the caterpillar. I hear the dust dreaming of eyes and great winds. Further ahead, someone even more silent passes over the grass without bending it. And all of a sudden in the midst of that silence it seems possible to live simply on the earth.

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And here is another:

*Moons*

There are moons like continents, diminishing to a white stone softly smoking in a fogbound ocean; equinoctial moons, immense rainbarrels spilling their yellow water; moons like eyes turned inward, hard and bulging on the blue cheek of eternity; and moons half-broken, eaten by eagle shadows. But the moon of the poet is soiled and scratched, its seas are flowing with dust. And other moons are rising, swollen like boils. In their bloodshot depths the warfare of planets silently drips and festers.

I don't know if it is still done—pray heaven it's not—but when I was in public school the poor old maids who taught English would often assign as a class exercise the writing on set themes of what were called "descriptions," or sometimes "word-paintings." Rarely did they turn up anything with the facile imagery of these two paragraphs, though this was what they wanted, what they forlornly strove for among their pubescent charges. Nothing could remind me more forcefully than these two paragraphs, with their complacent suggestiveness, passiveness, inertness, of the chalkdust sentimentality of my early education. It is Proust's madeleine exactly. Yet surely by now everyone recognizes what I have done, and what a sorry old trick it is. I have printed two poems as prose. And their authors are far from being schoolboys, or beginners in any sense; quite the contrary. They are poets who have published a good deal in the past half-decade or longer, and their names are known to everyone who follows contemporary poetry with more than passing attention. They are, respectively, Charles Simic and John Haines.[1]

Now let me restore their poems to the forms they gave them.

SUMMER MORNING

I love to stretch
Like this, naked
On my bed in the morning;
Quiet, listening:

Outside they are opening
Their primers
In the little school
Of the cornfield.

There is a smell of damp hay,

[1] DISMANTLING THE SILENCE, by *Charles Simic*. Braziller. $3.95. THE STONE HARP, by *John Haines*. Wesleyan University Press. $4.00 (cloth); $2.00 (paper).

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Of horses, of summer sky,
Of laziness, of eternal life.

I know all the dark places
Where the sun hasn't reached yet,
Where the singing has just ceased
In the hidden aviaries of the crickets—
Anthills where it goes on raining—
Slumbering spiders dreaming of wedding dresses.

I pass over the farmhouses
Where the little mouths open to suck,
Barnyards where a man, naked to the waist,
Washes his face with a hose,
Where the dishes begin to rattle in the kitchen.

The good tree with its voice
Of a mountain brook
Knows my steps [*sic*]
It hushes.

I stop and listen:
Somewhere close by
A stone cracks a knuckle,
Another turns over in its sleep.

I hear a butterfly stirring
In the tiny soul of the caterpillar.
I hear the dust dreaming
Of eyes and great winds.

Further ahead, someone
Even more silent
Passes over the grass
Without bending it.

—And all of a sudden
In the midst of that silence
It seems possible
To live simply
On the earth.

MOONS

There are moons like continents,
diminishing to a white stone

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softly smoking
in a fogbound ocean.

Equinoctial moons,
immense rainbarrels spilling
their yellow water.

Moons like eyes turned inward,
hard and bulging
on the blue cheek of eternity.

And moons half-broken,
eaten by eagle shadows . . .

But the moon of the poet
is soiled and scratched, its seas
are flowing with dust.

And other moons are rising,
swollen like boils—

in their bloodshot depths
the warfare of planets
silently drips and festers.

You see? I have changed nothing in my prose versions but typographical arrangement and punctuation (including the possible typographical error in the sixth stanza of Simic's poem). Yet the meaning of my little experiment is so plain that I am willing to risk four contentions upon it.

First, these two poems, taken as formal structures, are perfectly characteristic not only of the work of these two poets but of the great mass of other poems by poets under forty now writing in the U. S. This is crucial, all the rest depends on it. Of course anyone can deny what I say and find plenty of exceptional cases to "prove" the point, but I rely on the good sense and good will of poetry-readers to concede my argument: that in look, tone, movement, imagistic structure, and all other textural qualities, these two poems are fairly and widely representative. For I have no wish to attack Simic and Haines, and would not mention them if it weren't necessary to argue from examples. They are honest, devoted workers. Here I am interested only in what is happening to poetry. What is happening to poets is another—probably far more difficult—question.

Second, both these poems not only lose nothing by being printed as prose, they actually gain from it. This is not because the poems are

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badly written. I pass over substantial triteness and silliness (dreaming spiders, the caterpillar's tiny soul, moons like rainbarrels, etc.), because I believe that in terms of structural and verbal elements both poems would be passed in any writing seminar in the country. The line endings are reasonable, the diction is simple and expressive, the poets have avoided the amateurish anapestic rhythms of much free verse (caused by excessive dependence on prepositional phrases in standard English speech: to the end, in a nutshell, etc.), and really there seems nothing to criticize: except that the language, taken altogether, is so slack, so devoid of formal tension and impetus, that the poems cease to function. What purpose do these lines serve, beyond making us read with unnatural emphasis and in a joggy cadence? It's all very well to say, as we did twenty-five years ago, that the language of prose cast against poetic measures will make good prosody. It wasn't true then and it isn't true now. These poems in free measure are just as flaccid as the limp iambics of the earlier period, and for the same reason. Let me say once and for all: not only must poetry be as well written as prose, it must be better written.[2]

Third, both these poems are part of the main evolution of modern American poetry, descended from Pound and especially from Williams, through Olson-Duncan-Creeley, with a very strong influence from Levertov, a certain influence from the Beats, and a reversionary influence from older poets like H. D., Zukofsky, Oppen, Ignatow, and many others. A few people perhaps even remember the part played by Byron Vazakas. No matter; the point is not to recapitulate a tired history but to recognize that the idea of the poetic line is central to it all. From first to last, whether conceived as a breath unit, an aural device, an inherent function of language, part of a culturally necessary tradition, or whatever—from first to last the line has been our functional key to poetry. I am not speaking of developments outside the main evolution, such as prose poetry, which has not progressed much beyond Fiona Macleod, or poetry based on arbitrary typographical designs, like James Laughlin's little poems that I greatly admire. I reject the feeble conundrum of what is poetry and what is prose. I simply say that historically and at present the line is our basic unit of poetry, that for my part I would not have it otherwise, and that ninety-five per cent of the other working poets in America agree with me, whatever their particular allegiances may be.

Fourth, when poems gain in fluency and intelligibility, and hence in meaning, from being printed as prose, it is because the line has ceased to function, as I have already said, and when the line has ceased to function it is because the language has become too dull to sustain the measure. This, incidentally, is the right way to say it: language sustaining measure, not, as many have thought or hoped, the other

[2] Who wants prose now anyway, if prose is the leaky string of sausage that goes by that name? Barth, Mailer, and Tom Wolfe are welcome to it.

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way round. From this it is not hard to deduce the anterior reason for dull language, which is simply the loss of formative energy in the current phase of American poetry. Whatever name we call it, the heave has subsided. If this has happened sooner than we would have expected, I believe the cause lies demonstrably in the proliferation of verse-writing classes at our universities during the past decade; we have been turning out poets by the tens of thousands. These are the poets who give us the evidence of collapse, evidence that smothers us and stultifies our sensibilities as the wave of poetry mounts. The masters, the leaders, are in no danger; in most cases their work continues fresh and strong, though we note that, formally speaking, they are not breaking new ground—not even in the sense that Pound, Williams, and Eliot continued to break new ground as long as they were active. But the followers, not the leaders, are the sufferers now. One needs no great acumen to foresee that a revulsion will come, even if one has no idea of its potential source nor any arguable notion of its form. But unless the vitality has suddenly departed from American poetry, which I do not believe, or unless there are countervailing political and social factors that lie outside the scope of this discussion, which I do not really believe either, it will come soon. . . .

Not all the poetry in the common mold is as reasonable as the work of Simic and Haines; not by a long shot. Miller Williams' new book[3] is neither good poetry nor good prose. It is bad writing. Williams published his first highly derivative book in 1964, then did some inadequate translations of work by Nicanor Parra, who deserves better, then some anthologies, some more poems, etc., with results that have been parlayed into ten books in seven years, a promotion from university presses to posh New York publishers, and a diadem of bright obligatory blurbage from his colleagues. No need to ask how this is done. The pity is that it can be done at all, and in our very midst.

Ted Hughes, the popular British poet, is a case of the same sort, though more clever than Williams. He is the perfect English literary type, a man of immense literary sensitivity who can perceive the least nuance of literary fashion and put it to his own use. He can do this with every appearance of originality, since that is part of fashion. Yet I have always felt that his past work, except for two or three short stories, was original in appearance only, and that it was essentially a fabric of invention done to create that appearance. He is the journeyman *par excellence* of the English literary guild, with its emphasis on gamesmanship, cultism, and the morality of leisure. His new book, *Crow*,[4] was conceived as a joint project with the American artist Leonard Baskin, who strikes me as Hughes' perfect counterpart. Here we have, however, only part of the text and none of the drawings of the planned work. Crow is a mythological bird, done in the

[3] THE ONLY WORLD THERE IS, by *Miller Williams*. Dutton. $4.95; $2.45.
[4] CROW, by *Ted Hughes*. Harper & Row. $5.95.

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existential and expressionist traditions, to stand for the trials, courage, and humor of modern man. This is an extremely attractive idea to me; it goes near the heart of every tough and useful attitude in interpreting the experience of my lifetime. It is fable-making in a relevant modern form, and one can ask no more of any literature.

CROW'S SONG OF HIMSELF

When God hammered Crow
He made gold
When God roasted Crow in the sun
He made diamond
When God crushed Crow under weights
He made alcohol
When God tore Crow to pieces
He made money
When God blew Crow up
He made day
When God hung Crow on a tree
He made fruit
When God buried Crow in the earth
He made man
When God tried to chop Crow in two
He made woman
When God said, "You win, Crow,"
He made the Redeemer.

When God went off in despair
Crow stropped his beak and started in on the two thieves.

It is audacious, it is true. But also easy, pat, and glib. The fable lacks the grain of authenticity, which can come in such a work only from a genesis in bedrock imaginative experience. Language is the clue, as always: that formulaic schoolboyish rhetoric, without verbal trust or affection. It is the same with substance. The ugliness, despair, and moral pain of the poetry are not genuine but derivative and predictable. Thirty-five years after *Man's Fate,* twenty-five after *The Plague,* fifteen after *The Tin Drum,* we have *Crow,* and it is a long descent. Existential agony has become as slick as Winnie-the-Pooh. We see from the jacket notes, in fact, that Hughes has written a number of children's books and that presumably this is how he makes his living. *Crow* has the qualities of children's literature, the same condescension not only toward the reader but, what is worse, toward the substance, toward the work itself; which is why the few good books for children were written for adults first. All at once I see what is wrong with most English writing I have read in the past fifteen years, and with much from before as well, large chunks of Auden and Spender, C. S. Lewis,

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Tolkien, Durrell—who knows where to stop?—Chesterton, Beerbohm, Peacock. They were all writing children's books for adults.

I am puzzled by the inaptness of Richard Howard's title for his new book, *Findings*.[5] Of course one may find something at the end of the most labored exploration, and presumably this is the sense he intends to convey, since nothing in his poems suggests the luck of unexpected discovery. Instead we have conscious artifice, the most elaborate "literary" poems. Clearly Howard does not fall under my strictures respecting lack of verbal tension in the common style; he has done everything to avoid the common. Or almost everything: for his originality, nearly unique today, is still based on the example of a famous forebear, Robert Browning. Howard has made his reputation, which is now considerable, from his Browningesque dramatic monologues, and it is fitting that the longest in his new book, fourteen pages in length, should be given to the *maestro,* speaking on his last day. Howard's monologues are almost flawlessly written: voice and manner acutely toned; smooth, careless, erudite to the point of acknowledged ironic pedantry, aristocratic: *suave* is the word, I think. Everything permitted for the sake of texture. Yet though I have read them with a certain fascination, as I might read the speeches of Harry Truman if his ghostwriter had been William Faulkner, I cannot quite accept them. Why? I ask myself if I can still accept Browning, and I turn back to my favorites, "Andrea," "Fra Lippo," "How It Strikes a Contemporary."

> I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
> I regret little, I would change still less.
> Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
> The very wrong to Francis!—it is true
> I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
> And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
> My father and my mother died of want.
> Well, had I riches of my own? you see
> How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
> They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
> And I have laboured somewhat in my time
> And not been paid profusely.

Did anyone ever talk like that? No, of course not; yet a serious melancholy man, God knows, a man given to fear, sin, poverty, given to art and the degradation of age, might wish to speak so.

> There is always another, one more,
> one *last* Grand Hotel: far-fetched, far-flung,
> but built to last. At least penultimate, surely,
> Rimini's Grand Hotel du Miroir

[5] FINDINGS, by *Richard Howard*. Atheneum. $3.95.

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stares down its methodical rivals,
modest interlopers on the English Parade
where all the pretty kiosks pointed
once as a matter of course to this
thermal term, this nearly pearly, nougat-textured,
art-nouveau pavilion. . . .

Would anyone wish, really wish, to speak like this, anyone but a *poseur* and Jack-a-dandy? Browning was a poet; which is to say, a maker, a creator, not an artificer. He was serious about what he was doing. And the first test of seriousness in poetry is a willingness to resist the temptations of poetry. Howard has resisted nothing; every verbal ornament goes in, every alliteration, assonance, bouncing rhythm, and wicked epithet; and frankly, when I come to "this thermal term, this nearly pearly, nougat-textured, art-nouveau pavilion," I gag. Yet the difference, evident as it is to our senses, is not easy to track to its origin. Both Browning and Howard are conspicuous in their poems; they can't be mistaken. Perhaps it is a matter of positioning. Browning in his best work seems subservient to his lines, while Howard, like the Master of the Hunt, whips his pack along.

As against all previously quoted examples, here is one from A. R. Ammons' new book, *Briefings*.[6]

Morning's the woman time of day,
light rising
as in a small failure,
the parting of fog
to cloud,
the casual centerless thunder
and the rain beginning
so sporadic
the eye can hardly weave the evidence
and then rain
full rain
windless,
the iris unshook from its beads,
the firs like old old
men dripping their bottoms wet:
I catch my breath
I throw my clothes on
I have to get out of the house
and, out, my eyes'
concision shoots to kill.

No prose there, these lines are working. And though this is not an important poem, it is all the more significant because it does evince the verbal tension I am talking about. I am embarrassed because I

[6] BRIEFINGS: POEMS SMALL AND EASY, by *A. R. Ammons*. Norton. $6.00.

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cannot pin it down more closely. But no prescriptive criticism can be successful; no one can tell you how to make a good poem. I can say only that there is an exact rhythm, and behind the rhythm is an exact word, and behind the word an idea, and behind the idea a feeling, and behind the feeling a massive esthetic impulse, an energy. These I detect in Ammons' poetry. I can point to the results: "the iris unshook from its beads," "the casual centerless thunder," and the perfect pace of "I catch my breath," among others. I detect also a number of habits I dislike or consider useless, such as Ammons' too frequent reliance on extreme enjambment, lines ending in *the* or *and*—the potential slight effect lost in the repetitions. But surely he has come a long way from the talky poems of his first couple of books. His poems now are lean, resilient, and interesting. A few in his new collection are beauties —difficult, difficult!—and the general level, except where he falls into the philosophical archness that seems another recurrent failing, is high.

James Wright's new book[7] is a more complicated matter, if only because it is his collected edition, offering all his poems and translations to date, except a small number from his first book which he has chosen to omit. It is twenty years' work, a sizable and variable volume. But a more difficult complication for me is the peculiar affinity I feel for Wright as a poet, though I have never met him as a person; and I think many other writers of my generation must feel the same way. With respect to origins, Wright's early poems recall exactly those years of the late 1940's, the time when we had an ideal music running in our minds. I suppose each of us knew it differently; for me it was the dirge from *Cymbeline* (Act IV, Scene II). If only, I thought, I could get modern experience into that measure. In general our favorites were the poets of the English Renaissance from Wyatt to Marvell, but then we skipped all the way to Hardy, late Yeats, early Pound, Ransom, Muir, Cummings. The rhymes are a giveaway, their modulating echoes, and when I read them in Wright's poems—*color/dolor, mirror/terror, meadow/shadow*—I smile in rueful sympathy. How we longed for the shattering loveliness that was represented but somehow never embodied in those sounds. It was hopeless. Nevertheless there are still fine poems in Wright's first book, especially "The Horse" and "She Hid in the Trees from the Nurses." His second book was a characteristic letting-down. The meters are stricter there, mostly straight iambic, but the life has gone out of them, they are monotonous, and too often the beat falls on unaccentable syllables. These poems are said by one critic to resemble Frost's, but to my mind the analogy is far closer to Robinson's: the same emphatic and facile meters, the same heavy Robinsonian irony, the same obsession with death and insanity. Above all there is the inability to break off, which Robinson also suffered; many of the poems are too long. Then in his third and fourth books Wright moved into the freer poems we know today. We find in them

[7] COLLECTED POEMS, by *James Wright*. Wesleyan University Press. $7.95.

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traces of his friends: Robert Bly's epiphanic anecdotes, Galway Kinnell's numbered narratives, the strange emblematic metaphors of W. S. Merwin; and frankly many of them do not succeed. They seem insubstantial, as if Wright had been so taken by a sudden airy idea that he could not discard it when its brilliance faded—something all poets must learn to do—but had pushed it through to a conclusion it could not justify. Yet though these poems seem comparatively many, I do not think we should emphasize them, because the others, the ones that do succeed, succeed so remarkably. Hard, clear, simple, abiding; the tragic sense carried forward in classic wholeness to a time that had thought tragedy no longer adequate to its fragmented horror. We are reminded that the tragedy of Lear is a comedy that is, still and after all and forever, a tragedy; and Wright, though brevity is not his strength, can say more of it in three lines than Ted Hughes in a volume.

> The anguish of a naked body is more terrible
> To bear than God.
> And the rain goes on falling.

I noted these poems especially from the latter part of Wright's book, but could have noted a score of others: "Old Age Compensation," "Speak," "In Memory of Leopardi," "A Secret Gratitude," "Many of Our Waters." They make his *Collected Poems* a book no one should miss.

Two further books can have only incidental notice in an omnibus review, Allen Tate's *The Swimmers* and Robert Duncan's *Tribunals.*[8] Tate's book is in effect his new collected edition, because it reprints the complete text of his *Poems 1922-1947,* to which are added six later poems and a section entitled "Early Poems." I do not think these latter will add to their author's already great distinction, but it is good to have them in print again and students of his poetry will be grateful. Among the more recent poems, two seem to me quite the equal of his earlier best work, "The Swimmers" and "The Buried Lake." I hesitate to say more, however, partly because this review gives no chance for the extended discussion such a book warrants, and partly because, like others of my generation, I have known Tate as a friend and benefactor for many years, so that in the public view I am disqualified. Yet can friendship blind one either to the extreme difficulty and starchy ostentation of some of his poems, or to the greatness of other poems in which these qualities are transmuted and transcended in the force of an imagination that has no superior since Rimbaud? I doubt it. But the encomia had best be left to the encomiasts. I will add only a rebuke to the production staff at Scribner's: the book is poorly designed, cheaply manufactured, and my copy is misbound so that it breaks off

[8] THE SWIMMERS AND OTHER SELECTED POEMS, by *Allen Tate.* Scribner's. $5.95. TRIBUNALS, by *Robert Duncan.* Black Sparrow. $2.00.

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and begins over again on page 164. One is aggrieved to think of the attention lavished on poetry of far less value, or of no value at all.

Robert Duncan's book requires even briefer mention. It is an interim publication, very attractively brought out, for the use of bibliophiles and Duncan's particular fans, comprising five additions to the sequence of *Passages,* numbers 31 to 35. In them the poet continues his exploration of religious, esthetic, and political motifs, moving closer than previously to a statement of faith which can fit, after all, in the explicit Christian tradition. The poems are beautiful, firm, versatile, and important, but further comment should await a larger presentation.

And now here at last is the book that has given me this quarter's greatest pleasure, a pleasure not only in poetry but in discovery, and in the reassurance a somewhat overworked sensibility derives from the renewed enthusiasm of its own response.[9] Until a few weeks ago I had read the work of Hugh MacDiarmid only in anthology snippets, without much understanding of what he has accomplished or why he is so well regarded. Then I picked up this new edition of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.* For the benefit of those who are as ignorant as I was, let me say that it is a long poem, 2685 lines, originally published in 1926, the first important poem MacDiarmid wrote in what he calls "braid Scots," after a decade or more of writing and publishing in English; the poem signifies his turn not only to linguistic nationalism but to political nationalism and radicalism in general, though he had not yet become an expressly committed Communist. Like a few other major poems of similar proportions, this one was written without a plan and begun without much notion of where it was going; written, as a matter of fact, in bits and pieces, sequences and interpolations, with varied meters and moods throughout, though the prevailing tone is the crambo-clink 'o Rabie Burns. The situation is Burns's too: a drunken man, like the Cotter, fallen, in his unsteady journey from tavern to home, into a moonlit field where he lies gazing at a huge blossoming thistle. Yet the analogy with Burns should not be forced; MacDiarmid nowhere uses the exact six-line stanza that Burns used for so many of his topical and satirical works—in the variety of other meters and rhyme-schemes one feels that this must have been intentional —and MacDiarmid's drunk is a far more sophisticated person than Burns's eighteenth-century rustic. Indeed it would be impossible to suggest all the visions and notions, phantoms and sermons, songs and satires, the whole lush soliloquy that MacDiarmid's sodden hero derives from and addresses to his thistle. They include imaginary conversations with Melville and Dostoievski, parodies of Eliot, translations from French, German, Russian, and Italian—all in braid Scots—historical speculations on themes from Spencer and Solovyev, and so on and so on. The first five hundred lines, approximately, seem to me not quite in tune; awkward, rough (where roughness was not meant),

[9] A DRUNK MAN LOOKS AT THE THISTLE, by *Hugh MacDiarmid.* Edited by John C. Weston. University of Massachusetts Press. $7.50.

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hesitant. But then the poem comes together, not thematically so much as modally, and all the strains of feeling cohere, Scotch pride and abjection, bawdry and tenderness, rationalism and folklore, decorum and impudence, making a song of multiplex rising tension that holds almost unbroken for two thousand lines and ends on a vision of vast humanistic communalism which seems—however hopeless in retrospect and at our moment of history—absolutely convincing at the time of reading. It is a great, deeply moving poem. Quotation outside that rich context is virtually impossible, but I can't resist one song done in two voices, a man's and his sweetheart's:

O wha's been here afore me, lass,
And hou did he get in?
—*A man that deid or was I born* *died ere*
*This evil thing has din.*

And left, as it were on a corpse,
Your maidenhead to me?
—*Nae lass, gudeman, sen Time began* *since*
*'S hed ony mair to gie.* *any more to give*

*But I can gie ye kindness, lad,*
*And a pair o willan hands,*
*And you sall hae my breists like stars,*
*My limbs like willow wands,*

*And on my lips ye'll heed nae mair,*
*And in my hair forget,*
*The seed of aa the men that in* *of all*
*My virgin womb hae met . . .*

As long as poetry lasts for me, those lines will go with the best of the best.

Professor Weston's edition of *A Drunk Man* is intelligent and modest. The glosses are printed in the margins, as I have given them above, and err, if at all, by being distractively complete; but they do make the reading easy. Notes to thematic problems are at the foot of the pages. A brief, simple, helpful essay is printed as an appendix. The format is cleanly designed, the text carefully printed—I noted only three typographical errors—and the book is easy to hold and use. In short the only fly in the ointment, and it is more like a great sullen turkey, is the sadly demonstrable fact that neither I nor most other Americans can read the poem at all; I mean in its own language, sounded properly. I wish heartily that the University of Massachusetts Press, having done such a splendid job so far, would now complete it by giving us a recording of the entire poem, read by the author if he is a good reader, or otherwise by some talented and sensitive profes-

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sional.[10] There must be someone who can read Scots as well, for example, as Siobhan McKenna reads Irish. And with a poem of this length I think we want a smooth performance, even at the cost, if necessary, of the interpretive values of the poet's own reading.

If any readers still doubt MacDiarmid's accomplishment, I recommend to them another book that has come to me this quarter, *The Collected Poems of George Bruce*.[11] Bruce is younger than MacDiarmid by ten years or more, yet has unaccountably failed his elder's example: he writes in English. His poems are acceptable. Some are better than that. They give us pointed, pleasant glimpses of modern Scottish life, especially in the rough fishing towns of the northeastern coast. They are, I gather, highly esteemed in Scotland and are published by the Edinburgh University Press. But the most perfunctory comparison of the two poets will show how one has failed poetry by following the common literary mode, while the other has served brilliantly by denying everything but the truth of his ancient people and his own being.

Perhaps every poetry reading should end with something from Chinese, that immense delicate civilization which has upheld poetry for three thousand years on a few slight conventions, a few set themes: young love, the seasons, abandonment, journeying, ruined palaces and temples, the life of the hermitage. Here are three poems from Kenneth Rexroth's excellent new book of translations.[12] The first is from the time of Christ, the second from the eighth century, and the third from our own present age. A great deal is being said to us here, I think, if we have the wit and luck to understand it.

### A PRESENT FROM THE EMPEROR'S NEW CONCUBINE

I took a piece of the rare cloth of Ch'i,
White silk glowing and pure as frost on snow,
And made you a fan of harmony and joy,
As flawlessly round as the full moon.
Carry it always, nestled in your sleeve.
Wave it and it will make a cooling breeze.
I hope that when Autumn comes back
And the North wind drives away the heat,
You will not store it away amongst old gifts
And forget it, long before it is worn out.

—*Lady P'an*

[10] Is such a recording already available? I apologize if that's the case. Circumstances prevent me from finding out.

[11] THE COLLECTED POEMS OF GEORGE BRUCE. Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago. $5.95.

[12] LOVE AND THE TURNING YEAR: ONE HUNDRED MORE POEMS FROM THE CHINESE, by *Kenneth Rexroth*. New Directions. $5.50; $1.95. I should point out also that Rexroth has included not only his translations but notes and an extensive bibliography, both very helpful to the reader untrained in Oriental studies.

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BIRD AND WATERFALL MUSIC

Men sleep. The cassia blossoms fall.
The Spring night is still in the empty mountains.
When the full moon rises,
It troubles the wild birds.
From time to time you can hear them
Above the sound of the flooding waterfalls.

—*Wang Wei*

IN THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

Wild flowers and grass grow on
The ancient ceremonial
Stairs. The sun sets between the
Forested mountains. The swallows
Who nested once in the painted
Eaves of the palaces of
The young prince are flying
This evening between the homes
Of woodcutters and quarrymen.

More ancient by far than the stairs
Are the cyclopean walls
Of immense dry laid stones covered
With moss and ferns. If you approach
Quietly and imitate their
Voices, you can converse all day
With the tree frogs who live there.

—*Wang Hung Kung*

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VERNON YOUNG

# Something like a Theocracy

IF THERE WERE A HEADSTONE somewhere marking the grave of Osip Mandelstam, one of the most enigmatically remarkable poets of twentieth-century Russia, there might be inscribed on it the bare information that there is no volume of his work available in Russia today and that before August, 1964, when nine of his poems were published, not a line of his work, in either prose or verse, had appeared in print for thirty-two years. Now it is thirty-six years since his first arrest (he had written a poem deriding Stalin, unpublished of course, one draft of which had either been quoted or procured by an informer), the sequel to which, thanks to Boris Pasternak, was three years "exile" instead of a firing-squad or instant banishment to a forced-labor camp: if indeed this calls for thanks, since the physical misery and torturing hope of those three years would seem to most of us literally a fate worse than death. Stalin had him put on ice—his instructions were, "Isolate but preserve," meaning that for three years Mandelstam and his wife Nadezhda, the author of this memoir,[1] were permitted a strictly limited choice of area in which to live, while the regime played with them like a cat with broken-winged birds until the appropriate moment came to arrest Osip the second time. After lulling him into a false security at the last hour, the secret police picked him up on a May morning and sent him to the Siberian wilderness. There, undermined by malnutrition, angina pectoris, mental strain, arctic frost and possibly typhoid fever, Mandelstam apparently died within the first year.

There is no headstone. There may be a little black shadow somewhere, caressed by an icy wind. Nothing can be stated of the poet's death or of the circumstances immediately preceding it without the cautious addition of just such adverbs as "apparently," "evidently," "probably," "allegedly." The Central Committee's Registry Office issued a death certificate to Osip's brother in 1940. Otherwise they were as indifferent to Mandelstam's cadaver as they had been towards him as a living corpse. He received rather more attention, in fact, at least from officials who stamped documents, as he and his wife plodded from one dreary exile residence to another, secretly hoping that history would transform itself, than he did when safely horizontal and put on ice forever. A familiar story, to be sure. Mandelstam's fate was not unique. This may be one area in which familiarity does not breed contempt, except for the regime that has made the story familiar.

[1] HOPE AGAINST HOPE: A MEMOIR, by *Nadezhda Mandelstam*. Translated by *Max Hayward*. Atheneum. $10.00. The translator has supplied an invaluable Appendix which includes Notes on Persons Mentioned in the Text.

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Towards that regime, contempt is an inadequate term with which to express, by now, our reaction, a compound of something resembling awe, unqualified horror and incredulity.

Why, then, is Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir to be read? What does it tell us of the fifty years' captivity of a people who "made a revolution" which we have not already learned? From that view, perhaps nothing that takes us by surprise; one more document for evidence we scarcely need of the patent iniquity of the USSR. The virtues of her book are intrinsic; they are personal and suggestive. She does of course supply us with an indisputably authentic record of her husband's blasted life and ignoble death, and of his thoughts on the noble process of writing verse. Since her quotations from that verse and from the prose are fragmentary and since the major subject of her book is not the *poetry* of Osip Mandelstam but the *sufferings* of Osip Mandelstam, my review will likewise try to sound that subject.[2] Actually, what emerges most strongly from this work, rather more than the personality of Osip, which remains somewhat phantasmal from beginning to end, is the character of Nadezhda, herself; not because she advances her own ego in any inappropriate way but because the sheer natural wisdom of the woman is a great, quiet force enveloping her narrative without effort, special pleading, self-pity or justifiable (we'd say) indignation. She is—no shadow of a doubt—a great heart and a pure intelligence. Honesty is a word that needs all our analysis and our illumination; many people seem honest when they're merely shameless. Nadezhda embodies an old, old wisdom, she represents an abstraction which often makes us bridle yet cannot be dismissed as a kitsch figure of speech—the soul of the Russian people: for she reveals, with no semblance of telling us anything novel, just what it means, for good and ill, to be Russian. *Just* what it means? I am being rhetorical. A black mystery remains and Nadezhda is not a people; she is a specific woman, now seventy-two-years-old, with her own experience and her own shrewd conclusions about that experience. All the same, her eyes (in the photograph that faces the title page) cry out from the centuries of the Old Testament: post-exilic, occult, pained and absurdly hopeful.

She is a story-teller in an old tradition, though not a "professional writer." Max Hayward's translation, on the accuracy of which I can say nothing relevant, seems to be trying to exhibit an original simplicity but his English is not very graceful; if it were not for the enthralling content and the monumental sincerity of the author, the book would not be easy to read; the prose, especially when factual,

[2] Osip Mandelstam's "Fourth Prose," translated admirably by Clarence Brown (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, Spring 1970), reveals, as no other source can, that aspect of the poet's mind never adequately conveyed even by Nadezhda's memoir; it is a compact explosion of disgust, expressed in vitriolic metaphor and exalted by creative anger to a level of glee. Mr. Brown has supplied a concise chronicle of the immediate circumstances that inspired the document.

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stumbles on bruised feet. Even so, there are many passages that flow readily and Nadezhda Mandelstam, by instinct if not by labor, commands suspense with the manner in which she has chosen to reconstruct her winter's tale.

We know very well before turning a page that Osip Mandelstam was arrested for the last time in 1937 and perished shortly thereafter, yet we read the book as if ignorant of the fact or as if not wanting to believe the outcome, just as we might read a novel on the same subject. From time to time, Nadezhda offers a passing predication of this kind: "Before Osip's second arrest, I always believed - - -", or "This was of course before M's final arrest, when we knew that - - - -", or "I did not know then but after M. had been arrested the second time, I discovered - - - - - " and so forth. Extremely effective: for as the two of them wander over the face of Western Russia, haunting bare government offices for permits, living in whistle-stop towns, eating indescribably poor food, shivering in the damp and frigid air (they seem always to have been crossing a windy bridge somewhere), committing Osip's poems to memory or fearfully entrusting copies to dubious friends, while all the time privately, tenaciously and hopelessly hoping that the irreversible will be reversed, the return of those minor chords assures us how the composition will be resolved.

Nadezhda employs a linear chronology that begins in 1934 with Osip's "first arrest." As she tells her story and, in the course of their infernal journeys in a circle they encounter numerous other characters, she customarily stops to devote a paragraph, often a substantial chapter, to an individual colleague, an acquaintance, a sinister personage, or to a subject which has parenthetically evoked a reflection of immense import—on death, it goes without saying; on concepts of authority; on fear and indoctrination; on determinism and individual will; or on the equivocal nature of an accepted profile: that of Gorki or Pasternak. Person by person, place by place, idea by idea, she extends her narrative backward to the decisive Twenties and forward to the prayerful present in which she is writing, hence creating a panorama of life under Stalin no less damning than that of Solzhenitzyn and, for my reception, rendered with a sharper eye for the macabre, a more confident feeling for incidental dialogues and a much finer ear for knowing when her narrative should change its pace and when she should leave a "symbol" alone, instead of pawing it over with sweaty fingers. (Solzhenitsyn may well be a courageous man and a truth-sayer but the frequency with which critics call him a master comparable with Tolstoi baffles me. His novels remind me of goods trains; each segment coupled to the next in functional sequence, each marked *20 horses, 40 men,* and every car has a flat wheel.) With what admirable concentration she sketches for us, in this paragraph, all we need to know about the character of a dying town in the hinterland.

> [Savelovo] was set in sparse woodland, and in the market there

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the peasants sold berries, as well as milk and buckwheat for making kasha. There was a tearoom where we could go and read the local newspaper, which had the comic name, *The Invalid's Echo*. The tearoom was lit by a smoky kerosene lamp, whereas at home we had only candles. It was very difficult for M. to read by this kind of light because of the bad state of his eyes. We have all ruined our eyesight through having to sit by kerosene lamps all our lives. . . . The inhabitants of Savelevo worked mainly at the nearby factory, but they got a livelihood from the river by catching fish and selling it on the black market. It also provided them with fuel for the winter—on summer nights they used boathooks to pull in logs as they were floated down from the lumber camps on the upper reaches of the river. In those days the Volga still fed those who lived on its banks, but now a stop has been put to this as well, and the rivers are no longer a source of livelihood.

Our last glimpse of Osip Mandelstam, by way of a report from a camp inmate (*seemingly* reliable) is unbelievably in the spirit of a novelist's cunning. In the loft of a labor camp, Mandelstam, by the flickering light of a candle stuck on a barrel, is reading his poems aloud to a gang of convicts! Pure Dostoievsky, to be sure. And we must wonder sometimes if the long screaming ordeal of Russian history has any better assignable excuse for being than to provide such images for the Russian novelist.[3]

The slow steady massacre of a people ought not to engage us with considerations arising from comedy, yet an inference ever present in Nadezhda's appalling chronicle is as close to the absurd as to the terrible—and there comedy rears its head. Everybody in Russia (citizens and government alike—both terms euphemistic) has been playing a game for upward of fifty years, a game of which the object is known to both sides and which both sides steadfastly pretend is not being played. You might call this game, Conform or Perish; by common agreement, however, its performance is given no credence. Secret agents must be humored by your never insinuating that they *are* agents or by reproving them for so being. Policemen (i.e. of the N.K.V.D.) are sensitive; their good intentions when they search your house, hand you a warrant or chastise you for evading questions must not be impugned, the delicacy of their position must not be endangered; their exertions (ransacking your house until dawn for that incriminating scrap of paper) must not be taken lightly by an undue show of fear or disdain. District officials also require special handling. Some can be

[3] In addition to that convicts-by-candlelight tableau, the scheme of things contributed not a few incredible touches to Nadezhda's history which would be admired as artifice if planned by a professional novelist. Dictator and poet—as well as the Senior Guard who first arrested Mandelstam—have the same name (Osip = Joseph). Nadezhda means Hope. Osip and Nadezhda first met on May Day, 1919; he was first arrested in May of 1934 and she parted from him for the last time on May Day 1938 when he was led off to Siberia, "pushed from behind by two soldiers."

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charmed, gulled and with an exercise of finesse be insulted without their becoming aware, like the "agreeable" Commandant at Voronezh to whom Mandelstam offered to *mail* his verse every week in order to save needless trouble for the transparent spies sent to visit him. (Osip naturally refers to them, with a confidential smile, as "your men.") Others are less tolerant than the Commandant in question. Irony flusters them; they scream furiously, bang the desk, threaten the petitioner with Article 58. This, too, is an act. You confuse them if you don't cooperate with their simple intention of doing their duty. They shout because they want you to go away instead of standing there, asking to be arrested, which is no end complicated and may bring them nothing but stern reproofs from another official of the GPU.

Friends who disappear or who are labelled "convicted persons" had better not be discussed unless you can be wholly convinced that the acquaintance to whom you are speaking will remain as quiet as midwinter ice in the Volga. Preferably trust no one but never confess that you trust no one.

> It was essential to smile—if you didn't it meant you were afraid or discontented. This nobody could afford to admit—if you were afraid, you must have a bad conscience. . . . "I am trying to do my best for the State . . . if what's-his-name has been arrested, there must be good reason." The mask was taken off only at home, and then not always—even from your children you had to conceal how horror-struck you were; otherwise, God save you, they might let something slip in school. . . . Some people had adapted to the terror so well that they knew how to profit from it—there was nothing out of the ordinary about denouncing a neighbor to get his apartment or his job.

Humanity, of every class and ethnic group, was being spirited away, dispersed, dispatched. The very young and the very old died in droves. Generals and poets were at last brothers in status; their numbers were alike decimated. Nadezhda watched the remnants of the former Leningrad aristocracy sitting on their foreign-labelled trunks, waiting for trains to far-off wilderness villages where they were to shift for themselves; other trains carrying bearded peasants from the Ukraine and the Kuban; closed cattle-cars transporting prisoners—Germans from the Volga, Tartars, Poles, Estonians—to the labor camps of Eastern Siberia. To the True Believer, none of this was taking place.

An auxiliary game was available: the We-Could-Be-Worse-Off deviation. The senior guard who accompanied the Mandelstams on their first exodus in 1934 was perplexed by the poet's psychotic condition after his release from prison. Taking Nadezhda aside he begged her, "kindly sheepish eyes popping out of his head," to calm her husband down. "He had heard us mention the poem in our conversation and wanted us to know that people were shot only for spying and sabotage. In the bourgeois countries . . . it was quite a different matter; there

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you could be strung up in no time for writing some stuff they didn't like." The woman who delivered milk to them in Kalinin said with a sigh: "At least we get a little salted herring, or sugar, or kerosene now and again. But what must it be like in the capitalistic countries? I suppose you can just starve to death there."

> Even today [notes Nadezhda in 1964] the students believe that education for all is possible only under socialism, and that "over there" people are sunk in ignorance. . . . I tried to explain that "over there" you didn't need a permit to reside in a city, but nobody would believe me: since everything was so much worse "over there," the difficulty with residence permits was bound to be tremendous.

To conclude that the mass of the Russian people was either uninformed, by isolation, or misinformed, by indoctrination, explains far less than it appears to; even when mass populations know something of each other they continue to believe what they want to believe and if they travel they see only what they have determined to see. And what could one expect of the mass, in this case, when the educated sector had been as obtuse about its own destiny at home? An Arab can be swung on an idea as upon a cord, said T. E. Lawrence. All Left intellectuals are Arab.

> It was characteristic of those years that all such concepts as freedom, honor and conscience were treated as pure abstractions, divorced from the actual social and human framework which alone gave them substance. This made it all the easier to dismiss them out of hand: nothing was simpler, for example, than to show that nowhere in the world is there such a thing as absolute freedom of the press, and then to conclude that instead of making do with the wretched substitutes fobbed off on us by liberals, it was better to face up to the situation like a man and abandon all this hankering after "freedom". . . .

The author of this review was given just such an argument by a Czechoslovakian musician, member of an ensemble visiting Stockholm, in 1967 (on so small an allowance from his State that he and his wife and fellow-musicians slept in a tent between concerts, to save hotel bills). "Do you call *these* people free?," he asked, looking around him at a terrace-full of Swedes. (The brute! He was taking unfair advantage of a contingency, for he couldn't have fairly asked the question with impunity in any other Western country!) Yet, in point of fact, I heard substantially the same question, "Are *you* free?," during the Depression from New Deal Leftists in Pasadena (eminent among them the Oppenheimer brothers), together with the argument that the means employed by Russia justified the end. (This was in 1937-1938, the high tide of Yezhov's terror.) The *end,* I gathered, was the dictatorship of the proletariat, scarcely an ideal in which *I* could find either inspiration or reassurance.

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Nadezhda Mandelstam has no illusion that Stalinism was an unprovoked tyranny imposed on an innocent people. With disarming first-person candor she acknowledges the original sin of consent by which, year after year for thirty years, twenty million or more people (eventually) vanished from the face of Russian earth, without memorial and without the minimum decency of an accurate death notice.

> What we wanted was for the course of history to be made smooth, all the ruts and potholes to be removed, so there should never again be any unforeseen events and everything should flow along evenly and according to plan. This longing prepared us, psychologically, for the appearance of the Wise Leaders who would tell us where we were going. And once they were there, we no longer ventured to act without their guidance and looked to them for direct instructions and foolproof prescriptions.
>
> Since we could offer no prescriptions of our own it was logical to accept the ones proposed from on high. . . . In our blindness we ourselves struggled to impose unanimity—because in every disagreement, in every difference of opinion, we saw the beginnings of new anarchy and chaos. And either by silence or consent we ourselves helped the system to gain in strength and protect itself against its detractors—such as the housekeeper in Cherdyn or various poets and chatterboxes.

An extraordinary confession, this, for it unwittingly confirms the precise contentions of the nineteenth-century Slavophiles (moderate or extremist) in whose eyes the eternal model for Russia was the pre-Petrine nation of Muscovy, organically united under a patriarch.

> In Russia there could be no basis for a constitutional movement, for a democratic or socialistic revolution. These were all contests for power, possible only in states that had grown out of conquest and represented the rule of one part of the nation over the rest. Such was the case in Europe. The Russian people, renouncing power, nonetheless recognized its necessity for external defense and the safeguarding of their religious and social life, their customs and economic pursuits. This was the sacred obligation of their chosen protector, the absolute monarch. Absolutism was the only conceivable form of government; any other would require the participation of the people in politics, lead to struggles for power and disagreements over its limits, thus introducing legalism and formalism into a relationship that should be based on mutual trust and respect.[4]

Reprehensible as this doctrine may appear to historians who persist in applying liberal and dynamic criteria to Russian thought, it bears an uncannily distinct resemblance to Mrs. Mandelstam's ingenuous ad-

[4] Quoted from *The European Right;* "Russia," by Hans Rogger; editors, Rogger and Weber (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965).

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mission. In her case there is a further and more personal source of longing than that of Slavophile fervor—namely, Jewish Messianism, the eternally "deferred destiny" of the Chosen People who, after boundless suffering, will at last inherit dominion over the earth under a new redeemer. Jewish eschatological prophecies preceded and animated all others;[5] it deeply infected the Russian psyche, even while Jews were often the chief victims of Muscovite despotism. Seen in this light Karl Marx (if not Lenin, a non-Jewish Messiah) was merely a culminating figure in a long line of saviours, a "rational" prophet of deliverance in keeping with an age of enlightenment! Since Marxism and its perversions in Soviet Russia (now circulating everywhere in a bewildering variety of "interpretations") represents a Jewish scourge it is natural that Jews are prominent among its most desperate defenders and equally prominent among its most ruthless adverse critics.

Underlying the sanctions which were given by the Russian intelligentsia to those who rewarded them with wholesale murder or insufferable captivity there are too many separable strands for us to experience pity undiluted. It is dismaying to learn from Nadezhda that her husband once found no contradiction between theory and practise in the aftermath of the Revolution. In 1919 he thought the best form of social organization was "something like a theocracy. For this reason he was not frightened by the idea of authority even when it was translated into dictatorial power." But he was soon worried by the Party's organization when he realized that it resembled a church without God. As late as 1937, however, when he was already under virtual sentence of death he was ready to believe (during an onset of Judeo-Christian optimism, no doubt) in the validity of Soviet "elections." Remarkably, among the intellectuals and artists of the Twenties and Thirties—to say nothing of their numerous progeny today—scarcely one was prepared to concede that Stalinism was a logical extension of Leninism or that the terror under which he was frightfully living was an extension of the terror under which Russians had perennially lived, differing only in its scope, its cynically pretentious slogans and in the maniacal indifference with which it chose its victims. We find it difficult to decide whether the fatal attachment of Russians to Mother Russia is a profound and touching spectacle or pandemic insanity; probably the sin is mixed. As a Freudian I distrust the rhetoric which seeks to defend compulsion as a form of nobility. As an earth-lover I view with genuine reverence the devotion of a people to its soil.

Within the years of our subject, Isaac Babel was twice safely out of Russia[6] but his daughter assures us: "He always refused to emigrate and never once thought of his trips abroad as a means of escape. Moreover, his sense of honor demanded that he stay among his own

[5] cf. especially, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* by Norman Cohn (Secker & Warburg, 1957), and *The Icon and the Axe* by James Billington (Alfred Knopf, 1966).

[6] cf. *Isaac Babel The Lonely Years* 1925-1939, edited and with an introduction by Nathalie Babel (Fararr, Straus & Co., 1964).

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people." (His sense of honor did not demand that he stay in Paris with his wife and daughter?) We recall that Dostoievsky hated Turgenev for living abroad and that Serge Eisenstein, beyond the provocation of the Upton Sinclair fiasco, was moved by impulsions deeper than reason to fly back to the cage. Mandelstam, himself, had no urge to escape the country and was heartened to hear that a writer he knew had returned to Russia in the very moment when it was suicidal to do so. Only yesterday we have seen the phenomenon of Solzhenitsyn, afraid to visit the West to receive a prize lest he should not be permitted to *go back* to the country which has refused him the distinction implied by that prize! There remains something inexplicable, after all political causes have been listed, in the fact that it was possible for Stalin to execute four hundred (400!) generals without an effective cry of protest and in the epic fact that the millions of Russians who had *not* disappeared before 1941 fought German invaders with a courage that sounds like madness; you'd suppose that nothing, ever, could be worse than existence under their own regime. And even after the war in which they saved that regime as well as their own shrivelled skins, many of those who had survived the *Yezhovshchina* and the siege of Stalingrad were paid for their shattered lives by a renewed wave of executions. Clearly, "a sense of honor" alters nothing in Russia. We weep for those who, like Madame Mandelstam, have earned the right to assert that conditions are better than they were before the so-called thaw. Degrees of restraint are relative. If you have lived in forced confinement and are suddenly allowed to walk in the sunshine of the exercise yard, you will experience a tangible measure of freedom. We who watched the tanks trundling into Prague have the misgivings of detachment. If the last decade in Russia is by contrast with the Stalin era relaxed, we suspect that it is the relaxation of a muscle before it again flexes.[7]

A last word? There are so many last words. Joseph Conrad observed, in 1920, that the oppressors and the oppressed were all Russians together. And in nothing are they more alike than in their common ability to resolve their crimes with gallows humor. Mandelstam once demanded: "Why do you complain? Poetry is respected in this country. There's no place where more people are killed for it." A comparably straight-faced remark came from General Poskrebyshev, former chief of Stalin's secretariat when, after the death of Stalin, he was approached by a certain Madame S. who wanted to know if a Party-member friend of hers (who had disappeared during the Purge) had, as rumor said, been poisoned. "Which year was that?" the General asked. "1937—perhaps 1938." "He must have been shot," answered the General imperturbably. "We didn't start using poison until 1940."[8]

[7] According to Tibor Tzamuely, in a letter questioning the reliability of an *Amnesty* representative, there are today in Soviet Russia 500,000 political prisoners (see *Encounter*, August, 1970).

[8] The anecdote is reported by Harrison Salisbury in *The Soviet Union: The 50 Years* (Harcourt Brace, 1967).

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MARVIN MUDRICK

# Leavis, Dickens, and the Last Days

IF THIS[1] WERE A BETTER BOOK, its publication—so late in Leavis's very long career—might be an occasion for nervously congratulating the intractable old samurai on his services to literacy, not the least of which was to put the fear of retribution and ruin into the hearts of literary scholars and English Departments everywhere. Leavis has been whacking off heads for forty years now, as René Wellek once found out to his detriment, and the lecture-survey notion of literary history will never again be quite so voluminously smug. Leavis is a loner, a spoiler, an unclubbable man: even in the *Scrutiny* years he was megalithically *primus inter pares,* the sayer of the last stone word not only on the topics he chose for himself but on those introduced by his associates, as in a characteristic "rejoinder" to an essay by L. C. Knights—"I find myself with some embarrassment driven to point out . . ." (Leavis's politest way of intimating that his adversary is a criminal idiot). Doubtless his temper wasn't improved by Oxbridge's determination to suppress the upstart who presumed—from within the gates!—to dispute its taste and judgment, but then a kinder reception would have been unlikely to cheer him up either. Bernard Shaw's criterion (which Shaw himself never took seriously), that the critic must be a pariah, that "his hand should be against every man's, and every man's hand against his," seems to have been invented for the purpose of predicting and vindicating Leavis. Braced by rage all these years against battalions of British dons and American professors, Leavis is in no mood, as the dedication of this book makes plain, to share anything with anybody except his wife:

> We dedicate this book to each other as proof, along with *Scrutiny* (of which for twenty-one years we sustained the main burden and the responsibility), of forty years and more of daily collaboration in living, university teaching, discussion of literature and the social and cultural context from which literature is born, and above all, devotion to the fostering of that true respect for creative writing, creative minds and, English literature being in question, the English tradition, without which literary criticism can have no validity and no life.

Perfection is or at least has to be its own reward. Its disadvantage is that it doesn't encourage blunders and discoveries. The Leavis moral tone takes the measure of everything and keeps a record: one of the features of the Leavis page is the peppering of footnotes that jerk the

[1] DICKENS THE NOVELIST, by *F. R.* and *Q. D. Leavis.* Pantheon. $10.00.

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reader's eye down to past Leavisian pronouncements as if to Holy Writ: "I [F. R. L.] have discussed the force of this phrase of Lawrence's in the note at the end of *D. H. Lawrence: Novelist,* and in the essay on *Anna Karenina* in *Anna Karenina and Other Essays"; "V.* my [Q. D. L.'s] introductions and Notes to the Penguin English Library editions of *Jane Eyre* and *Silas Marner* and my essay on *Wuthering Heights* in *Lectures in America* . . ."; or—a fine stroke by Q. D. L.—". . . *v. Anna Karenina and Other Essays,* 'Adam Bede,' where F. R. Leavis discusses . . ." When all is said and done, it was all said and done in the family, and it was always right. Why, then, don't we get more references to past pronouncements on the subject of their new book?

The reason is that they've changed their minds about Dickens. For instance, in the new book's Preface (credited to both authors; each of the chapters is a solo performance), "We should like to make it impossible . . . for any intellectual—academic, journalist or both—to tell us with the familiar easy assurance that Dickens of course was a genius, but that his line was entertainment . . ."; while a generation ago, in *The Great Tradition,* Leavis told us with the familiar easy assurance that he had excluded Dickens from "the line of great novelists" because, though "Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics . . . the genius was that of a great entertainer. . . ." In *Dickens the Novelist* Leavis denounces "critics . . . who can tell us . . . that Dickens never grew up intellectually . . ."; while in *The Great Tradition,* exhibiting from an early James novel a (quite commonplace) passage in which "the influence of Dickens is plain," Leavis remarked that "of course" it "couldn't possibly have been written by Dickens: something has been done to give the Dickensian manner a much more formidable intellectual edge," that it "engages mature standards and interest such as Dickens was innocent of"; at another moment in the same book Leavis spoke, as he often does, for "the adult mind," which "doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness"; and in *Fiction and the Reading Public,* on the same issue, Mrs. Leavis was still more severe—"The peculiarity of Dickens, as any one who runs a critical eye over a novel or two of his can see, is that his originality is confined to recapturing a child's outlook on the grown-up world, emotionally he is not only uneducated but immature." In the same passage she dismissed the figure of Sir Leicester Dedlock as among "the painful guesses of the uninformed and half-educated writing for the uninformed and half-educated"; but in her chapter on *Bleak House* in *Dickens the Novelist* she devotes to Sir Leicester seven pages of enthusiastic analysis, concluding that he "ends in pathos and dignity and is like Gridley in representing the moral courage which in our Chancery world is heroism." In the new book she says that Dickens "gives proof of his understanding that Love as a reality, not a Victorian convention, did inevitably exist"; to the

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Mrs. Leavis of *Fiction and the Reading Public,* however, "Dickens stands primarily for a set of crude emotional exercises. He discovered . . . the formula 'laughter and tears' that has been the foundation of practically every popular success ever since (Hollywood's as well as the bestseller's). Far from requiring an intellectual stimulus, these are the tears that rise in the heart and gather to the eyes involuntarily or even in spite of the reader, though an alert critical mind may cut them off at the source in a revulsion to disgust" (the function of the "alert critical mind" being to stand guard over every rabbit-hole of feeling, at the ready for the popping out of inappropriate rabbits). The younger Mrs. Leavis compared Dickens unfavorably with Henry Mackenzie! (who "at any rate represent[ed] a cultivation of the emotions founded on a gentle code"); now, in her chapter on *David Copperfield,* she compares Dickens with Tolstoy and finds that "they are two similar geniuses of the art of the novel of whom the earlier has the additional prestige of being the great original." The most interesting pair of instances occur in Leavis's essay on *Hard Times,* which, after its first appearance in *Scrutiny,* is reprinted in both *The Great Tradition* and *Dickens the Novelist* with no indication in the latter that the last sentence of the opening paragraph has been substantially changed. The sentence reads now, in a riot of Jamesian commas that tacitly embrace all of Dickens: "Yet, if I am right, of all Dickens's works it is the one that, having the distinctive strength that makes him a major artist, has it in so compact a way, and with a concentrated significance so immediately clear and penetrating, as, one would have thought, to preclude the reader's failing to recognize that he had before him a completely serious, and, in its originality, a triumphantly successful, work of art"; whereas in *The Great Tradition* it was a sober qualification that categorically excluded all of Dickens except *Hard Times:* "Yet, if I am right, of all Dickens's works it is the one that has all the strength of his genius, together with a strength no other of them can show—that of a completely serious work of art." It is interesting, finally, that during twenty-one years *Scrutiny* published two articles on Dickens: one, Leavis's on *Hard Times;* the other, a conventional, unexcited piece by R. C. Churchill that refers, as if to self-evident fact, to such "more important novelists [than Dickens] . . . as George Eliot, Hardy and Conrad."

The point is not that the Leavises haven't the right to change their minds, or that they are disingenuous or dishonest in not letting us know they've changed their minds (surely they understand that not only their hosts of ill-wishers, but puzzled admirers, will recall and connect and wonder); it's that forty years of their insufferable moral tone—"There has been no excuse at any time for any reader not to realize the nature and take the force of this 'social criticism' as . . . [*Little Dorrit*] makes it" (though Leavis himself, as he doesn't say, needed forty years and more)—so many years of this bullying have made it impossible for them to acknowledge anything short of Argus-

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eyed omniscience. Something like truth, shifty and approximate, becomes as irrelevant as the weather to a space capsule in orbit.

The tone wasn't always so compulsive and disabling, and would sometimes virtually evaporate in the warmth of a congenial poet:

> Poetic creation as the nineteenth century understood it is often in Pope the essential means to a destructive satiric effect. It is so in the passage about Bentley, which is complex and varied in satiric method:
>
> As many quit the streams that murm'ring fall
> To lull the sons of Marg'ret and Clare-hall,
> Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport
> In troubled waters, but now sleeps in Port.
> Before them march'd that awful Aristarch;
> Plough'd was his front with many a deep Remark:
> His Hat, which never vail'd to human pride,
> Walker with rev'rence took, and laid aside.
> Low bow'd the rest: He, kingly, did but nod,
> So upright Quakers please both Man and God.
> Mistress! dismiss that rabble from your throne:
> Avaunt—is Aristarchus yet unknown?
> Thy mighty Scholiast, whose unweary'd pains
> Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton's strains.
> Turn what they will to Verse, their toil is vain,
> Critics like me shall make it Prose again.
>
> The famous pun on Port is a truly poetic pun, depending for its rich effect on the evocative power of the first couplet: the streams are really lulling as if they had been Tennyson's, with the result that, after "tempestuous," the "troubled waters" are to the imagination a stormy sea as well as a metaphorical *cliché,* and Bentley is both the Leaviathan resting in sheltered waters after majestic play and the befuddled don dozing. The satiric effect depends upon his being really felt as impressive; the majesty of the Leviathan is carried over to the "awful Aristarch." The impressiveness suddenly takes on a merely ridiculous aspect when the focus of attention shifts to the impressed:
>
> His Hat, which never vail'd to human pride,
> Walker with rev'rence took, and laid aside.
>
> —The Vice-Master of Trinity playing the flunkey is comically absurd, and Bentley becomes merely a comically, if sublimely, pompous old don. After that the satiric method changes; in Bentley's speech we are more aware of the ironical satirist than of the awful Aristarch himself:
>
> Turn what they will to Verse, their toil is vain,
> Critics like me shall make it Prose again.

This is from *Revaluation,* and here is another passage on Pope: "Is it

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necessary to disclaim the suggestion that he is fairly represented in short extracts? No one, I imagine, willingly reads through the *Essay on Man* (Pope piquing himself on philosophical or theological profundity and acumen is intolerable, and he cannot, as Dryden can, argue interestingly in verse); but to do justice to him one must read through not merely the *Epistles,* but, also as a unit, the fourth book of the *Dunciad,* which I am inclined to think the most striking manifestation of his genius. It is certainly satire, and I know of nothing that demonstrates more irresistibly that satire can be great poetry." Behind the first passage is Empson, behind the second, Eliot; yet neither could have written this generous statement of Pope's rank and quality; and *Revaluation* is one of the important books of literary criticism of the century, not only because it accommodates to its own purposes such innovators as Empson and Eliot, but because it offers the first coherent and plausible twentieth-century account of the English poetic tradition.

By the time Leavis arrives at Dickens, however, even the desire to praise doesn't help:

> We have here, representatively manifest, the impersonalizing process of Dickens's art: the way in which he has transmuted his personal experience into something that is not personal, but felt by us as reality and truth presented, for what with intrinsic authority they are, by impersonal intelligence. His essential social criticism doesn't affect us as urged personally by the writer. It has the disinterestedness of spontaneous life, undetermined and undirected and uncontrolled by idea, will and self-insistent ego, the disinterestedness here being that which brings a perceived significance to full realization and completeness in art. The writer's labour has been to present something that speaks for itself.

The last sentence is the annihilating commentary on all that precedes it. Veteran readers of Leavis will recognize the old code-words—"reality and truth," "intrinsic authority," "spontaneous life," "perceived significance"—but will be reluctant to grant that they were ever in the past used with such unevocative inertness, in such paraplegic cadences.

An unpsychiatric explanation of the difference between Leavis on Pope and Leavis on Dickens is that Leavis's critical procedure (like Eliot's) was developed and most effectively exerted in the study of poetry. The procedure, rooted in the altogether reasonable assumption that particular words and phrases count for almost everything in a literary work, emphasizes close analysis of representative extracts; but it's a procedure more sympathetic to poetry than to prose fiction, which is less localizable because it functions over much longer spans of attention toward much more mixed and more complicated effects. When Leavis began dealing with fiction on an ambitious scale, in the pieces which were eventually gathered into *The Great Tradition,* it became clear that he had met an unanticipated problem of evidence. He

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seemed to sense the problem, but showed no sign of learning how to cope with it, as his citations swelled into more and more numerous and grossly unwieldy "extracts," to which he would append efforts at close analysis that were usually defeated not only by the size of the extracts but by the refractory nature of fiction. Most of the time what he said appeared to have little to do with what he had quoted. He tended to settle into book-reviewer bosh, of the sort that culminates in *Dickens the Novelist:* "profound insight into human nature," "the infinitely varied power of his prose," "the inexhaustible subtlety of the greatest art," "consummate art," "cogent felicity," and—telltale compliment, when everything else seemed inadequate—"a great poet who is essentially a novelist" (has Leavis inadvertently reversed the nouns?), "Dickens the poet, the incomparable Victorian master of poetic expression" (all these from a few pages of the chapter on *Little Dorrit*). His style began to fail in its responsiveness to metaphor ("From the utilitarian schoolroom Mr. Gradgrind walks toward his utilitarian abode, Stone Lodge, which, as Dickens evokes it, brings home to us concretely . . ."), began to lose its (in any case limited) flexibility, and became characteristically—what it could always be in fits of Leavisian grandeur—tremulous, fussy, abstract, not deliberate but dogmatic, punctuated by irritable assertions of authority. So Mrs. Leavis, taking up the family burden, insists that "the rewritten end [of *Great Expectations*] is demonstrably superior," and "the idea now sedulously propaganded [*sic*] that Dicken's characters make merely theatrical gestures and facial signs is demonstrably false": immodest and powerless, the critic daydreams about producing mathematical proofs out of his pocket and pigeons out of his armpit.

Or, baffled by the loss of his ability to persuade, he conjures up a good old time when it was only necessary for authority to stand benignly by while the lower orders occupied themselves with fertility festivals and the rising middle class with close reading. What the Leavises, having renounced criticism, are now intent on celebrating is the Golden Age, such as Mrs. Leavis tried to recollect it in *Fiction and the Reading Public:* those halcyon days before the coming of the mawkish, uninformed, uneducated Dickens (in the newly revised version of the myth, Dickens is slipped in as the glorious climactic exemplar of the Age), when in the cities every reader pored over edifying, mind-stretching books and journals, and (as Leavis reminds us in his chapter on *Dombey and Son*) out in the suburbs, among the sinewy English workers and peasants, "the humble, populous and happy home of the Toodles family . . . stand[s] for that which is repressed and denied by the Dombey code: human kindness, natural human feeling, thriving human life." (According to Leavis, characters in fiction—"Sissy stands for vitality as well as goodness"—always "stand for" something or other: the guileless allegorizing is probably another habit left over from his earlier concentration on poetry, in which words are likely

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to have relatively unimpeded symbolic resonances.) As one would expect of such unappeasable traditionalists, the villains of their book are those criminal idiots who try to make do with the present, *i.e.*, all the rest of the extant population of the English-speaking world, especially Americans: "In our Kingsley-Amis type civilization 'delicacy' has become a term of contempt with the intellectual guardians of our culture"; ". . . in the opinion of the more recent trans-Atlantic thesis-writers (there is always a smart Dickens book in vogue with the academics and literary journalists, and those favoured at the moment seem to be Garis and Dabney) . . ."; "the Holloways of Eng. Lit." (John Holloway, who unlike the Leavises—the Murdstones of Lit. Crit.—is not plural, had ventured to publish an essay in respectful disagreement with Leavis's on *Hard Times*); "[Dickens] . . . is very often less simple-minded than his critics, especially those outside the English tradition and in such a brutally crude one as the modern American"; "To those troubled by the vanishing of what humanity more and more desperately needs if it is not to be deprived of all that makes it human . . ."; ". . . anyone who is now engaged in reading English Literature with undergraduates even in England must feel (unless of the same generation) that he has to introduce delicately complex perceptions and a social civilization of which that literature is the flower, to a brutally callous generation as to sensibility, students who except in rare cases have lost contact with the traditional culture . . ."; and—Mrs. Leavis's karate-chop in the groin of a trans-Atlantic critic who was only clearing his throat—"Perhaps a Victorian gentleman's view of having such a patron attached to him as father and house-mate cannot really be understood nowadays, particularly in a country that has accepted violence as a way of life . . ."

There is no end of embarrassments in the book, some familiar, some new. One of Mrs. Leavis's hobby-horses, as far back as her aborted book on Jane Austen, has been to "document" the events of a novel from the life of its author: about Dickens, now, she reveals that his sister "Fanny had played an important part in . . .[his] childhood (even as Florence did to little Paul [Dombey]) and her death contributed to the genuine feeling conveyed [in *David Copperfield*] in the death of David's mother." Having proved to her own satisfaction that a novelist (quite like one of those brutally American Method actors) needs to rake over his private miseries in order to work up a few pages of "genuine feeling," Mrs. Leavis doesn't scruple to initiate us into a yet higher stage of documentation: "Dickens has been scolded by critics for 'not seeing David's first marriage from the woman's (Dora's) point of view,' " but —let's look at the evidence—" . . . it is interesting that we *have* the woman's point of view on the same situation and that it rather surprisingly turns out to be essentially identical with Dickens's. . . . In *The Tortoise and the Hare* (1954) an able woman novelist, Miss Elizabeth

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Jenkins, shows . . ." that, believe it or not, Dickens knows as much about women as Miss Elizabeth Jenkins does. As if all this were not enough, Mrs. Leavis writes the worst sentence in a very badly written book: "For fortunately Dickens was not only a genius as a novelist, he was also a gifted editor and had an intuitive as well as an informed understanding of the problems of providing a diverse and even largely semi-literate and illiterate public with, not something it would have no effort to absorb as entertainment, but with what he himself wanted to write yet which must be presented in a form that such a mixed readership could cope with and get *something* out of—if not all that there was in it to get." Leavis himself, however gallantly he tries, can't match anything so derailed and frantic as that, though he contrives an occasional superlatively leaden sentence of the code-word kind that reads like articulate catatonia: "Actually, the Dickensian vitality is there in its varied characteristic modes, which should—surely—here be the more immediately and perceptively responded to as the agents of a felt compelling significance because they are free of anything that might be seen as redundance: the creative exuberance is controlled by a profund inspiration that informs, directs and limits."

Poor Dickens, when they finish with him, is labels from head to foot. People who sneer at "trans-Atlantic thesis-writers" shouldn't live in glass word-boxes. What the Leavises, speaking up for England, make of Dickens is their own collection of themes and theses as blank as the Leavisian code-words. Nothing much has to be noticed about the good characters except that they all stand for life, "vitality as well as goodness," disinterestedness, "the spontaneous, the real, the creative," "ego-free love," culture, civilization, tradition; all the bad characters stand for you know what; Dickens and the Leavises come out for the former, as Leopold Bloom came out for the opposite of hate. Nothing much, either, has to be noticed about failures of execution and texture, local discrepancies. Thus Mrs. Leavis pursues her thesis that *Great Expectations* is a "schematic novel" for which Dickens produces "the right, because the logical, solution to the problem of how to end without a sentimental 'happy ending' but with a satisfactory winding up of the themes," and she has no trouble welcoming this detritus of Victorian tics, tones, rhythms, repetitions, East-Lynne stage-sets, and sexual unspeakableness for the sake of which Dickens discarded his superbly terse first ending and almost spoiled a great novel:

> The freshness of her beauty was indeed gone, but its indescribable majesty and its indescribable charm remained. . . .
>
> We sat down on a bench that was near, and I said, "After so many years, it is strange that we should thus meet again, Estella, here where our first meeting was! Do you often come back?"
>
> 'I have never been here since."
>
> "Nor I."

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> The moon began to rise, and I thought of the placid look at the white ceiling, which had passed away. The moon began to rise, and I thought of the pressure on my hand when I had spoken the last words he had heard on earth.
>
> Estella was the next to break the silence that ensued between us.

But neither does Mrs. Leavis blush to write that *Great Expectations* is "seriously engaged in discussing, by exemplifying, profound and basic realities of human experience."

This profound and basic English, though thank God it isn't the language of Dickens the novelist, is the language of *Dickens the Novelist*. This is what remains of Leavis and company; but Leavis—in a way so special, so thoroughly assimilated into the body of contemporary critical practice, that bright young academics are hard put to understand why they owe him anything—was a distinguished critic and, even more, an exemplary literary figure a at time when the Anglo-American academy was confidently driving to establish for all time the difference between literary scholarship and mere criticism (the latter being to the former what jellybeans are to steak and potatoes). The academy could have neutralized the chameleon Eliot and the eccentric Empson, it could and did annex the genteel Brookses, Tates, Ransoms; but it couldn't fend off Leavis, who knew all the academic dirty tricks from the inside, was a pedant himself and the scourge of pedants, thrived on ostracism, remembered and extravagantly repaid all insults, triumphed not less by his malicious pleasure in crushing the stupid and infamous than by his appreciative intelligence. *Scrutiny* gave up the ghost in 1953: that was already at least a decade after Leavis had had anything new to say. He had won the war, but, victim of the spleen that had nerved him to fight it, was himself its most eminent and most depressing casualty.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

# Stranger than Truth

> The point is, that the function of the novel seems to be changing; it has become an outpost of journalism; we read novels for information about areas of life we don't know—Nigeria, South Africa, the American army, a coal-mining village, coteries in Chelsea etc. We read *to find out what is going on.* One novel in five hundred or a thousand has the quality a novel should have to make it a novel—the quality of philosophy.

So speaks the author of *The Golden Notebook,* herself contributor of a novel to this quarter's trove. My sense after reading some American novels from the last three months is that not only will you not get "the quality of philosophy" Doris Lessing asks of fiction, but that you will have to look hard to notice much beyond what loud and fancy prose styles various up-and-coming writers preen themselves on. While never one to disparage style as the index of literary virtue it should be a good style rather than a vicious one, for which latter affliction several sufferers will soon be treated. But there are still a fair number of warmed-over 'forties and 'fifties styles knocking around: sometimes the voice seems to float right out of the Lux Radio Theater or U. S. Steel Hour, at the very latest some Hallmark TV drama. Best to begin by looking for pithy, hard-hitting titles that promise to convey the eyeball-to-eyeball rawness of American life in these confused times: the realities of trashing, touching, dealing, feeling it—everything a reviewer might hope for in life provided him instead in real action words. *Trashing,* an apparent fiction by a real Weatherwoman (Abbie Hoffman's wife yet) is appropriately published by Straight Arrow Press but alas never materialized in my hands. The existence of the other three can be vouched for by consulting the following footnote,[1] and I am only sorry to announce that their contents didn't live up to their titles. Gwen Davis's first five novels were no doubt only preparations for *Touching,* a book about the wonderful wacky people you meet in weekend encounter groups (remember them?). The narrator is just an ordinary slightly mixed-up girl, but meets a terrific one named Soralee who turns out to be the tragic heroine of the whole venture. Nobody doesn't like Soralee, yet things just won't work out for her, and though she's got splendid fingers, wrists, legs, and is a good martini drinker, she talks like this: "I suppose I should have let them know how square I really was, but . . . I wasn't ready to screw around. I really wasn't

[1] TOUCHING, by *Gwen Davis.* Doubleday. $5.95. FEELING IT, by *L. H. Whittemore.* Morrow. $5.95. DEALING, by *"Michael Douglas."* Knopf. $5.95.

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ready for pot, I thought it was wrong. I love it now, pot, I mean, it's so beautiful getting hung up on the moment. . ." This novel constitutes a warning about how dangerous encounter groups may be for your health, and should be read by every serious-thinking adult today. *Feeling It,* on the other hand, is tame enough to have been adopted by the Literary Guild and merely goes through time-honored male stuff about growing up, masturbation, trying to make it with Joyce Clarkson and other activities. Quite harmless, though Whittemore's narrator is a bit too golly-whiz ingratiating. *Dealing* I determined to be quite superior to because of its cute pop-pot cover (illustrated "Head" and "Narc" and the eventual "Bust") but ended up amused at its brashness, a *Love Story* written by a basically fifties character (he is at Harvard, and talks about royally screwing exams or blowing lunch) nastied up a bit into amiable sarcasm, as here on the creation of a young drug dealer:

> You start with John Joseph Straight, single, on his way through life with one finger cocked piously up his ass and another thumbing through the Yellow Pages. To this sturdy fellow add two Pernicious Influences, one Psychedelic Experience, a taste of rock n' roll music, and some form or another of Idle Mind (which is widely accepted as the Devil's Playground). Beat Pernicious Influences and Psychedelic Experience until fluffy, add rock n' roll, season with Idle Mind, and lick the gummed side. Hold a match to one end, insert in mouth. You are now smoking a joint and wondering why you never thought to do this before

then later on:

> You change your name to Phineas Phreak or Seymour Stone, and wear bellbottoms and dirty BVD's and grow your hair down to your ass and try to keep from passing Go while still collecting your two hundred bucks for tuition every month . . . And probably by this time your parents have seen a picture of you in the papers with long hair, hanging out of the occupied administration building, and they have told you to come home to Flat Top Community College or be damned . . .

This could grow tiresome, except that there's a fair amount of drug lore and some real places like Berkeley, Cambridge and the Newton Tollbooth of the Mass. Turnpike; so I really didn't mind that the book failed to measure up to morally straight standards.

Marge Piercy, on the other hand, really means it, has written what seems to me a truly repulsive novel,[2] the first one about Indian Lib although actually it's about disaffected young who hate the pigs and learn to dance and share and have T-groups together, and eventually get themselves together enough to stage a revolution, sort of. Chapters

[2] DANCE THE EAGLE TO SLEEP, by *Marge Piercy*. Doubleday. $5.95.

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end with suspense-filled paragraphs: "There was fear everyplace. There was reason for fear everyplace. Wherever they went, they heard stories of arrests and beatings and raids and imprisonment." Piercy (she would like to be called that perhaps) writes a deadbeat prose that blinks not a whit at its own holocausts:

> It was an hour before everyone was out of the park. They left behind fifteen dead demonstrators, two dead children and three dead cops. Most of the bodies had been shot and then trampled, but one girl had bled to death from a severed artery in her neck, and two of the cops had been beaten to pulp with bricks and fists.

Not beaten to *a* pulp, mind you. Notice the absolute freedom from traditional categories of ethical judgment displayed by this passage. And contemplate the spectacle of Doubleday, that swinging publisher, advertising this book by hotting up "the open rebellion of America's youth against their channeled, unrewarding lives and the self-serving plastic society that directs them." Right on, Doubleday and Co., Right on, Marge Piercy.

Perhaps the only thing worse than deadbeat prose is its frenetic antithesis.[3] Two pages into Jerome Charyn's novel a reader has to endure being talked to this way:

> So I trundled off to Jennifer, riding past clumps of azaleas and a mountain of plums, while ordinary cockroaches and globs of city tar met inside my head. Jennifer is the foremost lady urchemist in our country, the adornment of Pallidton, the pride of Pally U. When she grows tired of feeding vitamins to monkeys, of inventing potency pills for wolfhounds, of watching starfish mate, Jenny convenes a conference, and tomorrow she's off to Kansas or Portugal, leaving me to guard her plants and feed Beppo, her overstuffed Maine Coon cat.

Sure, sure, and just think of how much more of this is to be endured before the book will conclude. Or perhaps only a novelist can really appreciate such creative prose; indeed one can watch them reviewing each other's books in any current *Sunday Times* Book Section. So Tom McHale (author of *Farragan's Retreat*) is filled with envy at Keith Mano's new one which has narrative like this:

> . . . he reached up, under Lee-lee's mini-skirt and brusquely goosed her most tender parts. Lee-lee leaped aside and fell in several sections, a beach chair collapsing, at knee, at hip, at shoulder. The gas

[3] *EISENHOWER, MY EISENHOWER*, by *Jerome Charyn*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $5.95. THE DEATH AND LIFE OF HARRY GOTH, by *D. Keith Mano*. Knopf. $6.95. FARRAGAN'S RETREAT, by *Tom McHale*. Viking. $6.95. CONY-CATCHING, by *Kerby Farrell*. Atheneum. $8.95. THE BUSHWHACKED PIANO, by *Thomas McGuane*. Simon and Schuster. $5.95. THE DICK GIBSON SHOW, by *Stanley Elkin*. Random House. $6.95.

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> cylinder toppled, bongggging, popping the masks from Sin-sin's and Adolph's noses. Lying on her side, Lee-lee cursed . . . Then Lee-lee went for his hair and they rolled across the carpet, woman-style, no holds barred. Lee-lee found his testicles and squeezed. Adolph tried to blind her and removed one false eyelash with his thumb. Sin-sin laughed in horror. The phone rang.

Imagine a reviewer setting out to describe the plots of such "novels"! At least Tom McHale, of Scranton Pa., has his hero do something on the last page: "His was the consummate loneliness: estranged even from God, he reasoned as he dropped the rosary listlessly to the floor. . . . He got in beneath the bed covers again, put the gun to his temple, and got up some guts." And another novel is over. At times of course there are difficulties; Atheneum must have been worried enough about Kerby Farrell's swollen effort to enclose excerpts from readers' reports about how compelling the book was "if the reader is willing to sit still long enough." Think of this reader, meekly sitting still and trying to respond to the Imaginative Quality of this:

> They played the Fifth Brandenburg, the one with the extravagant keyboard solo, then the little concerto in F. minor. At times she argued with the old magician himself, pulling his periwig while he gravely juggled the whole spindrift solar system; or idylled serene and voluptuous in the familiar bosky sunlight of his Largo (*farei parlando innamorar la gente,* says Dante). On the other hand, she worked at the music without showing off, self-absorbed as a woman in labor or Immanuel Kant picking a roadside buttercup.

Such prose can eat up anything, even poor Kant and the buttercup he may never have bothered with.

Contempt for the reader seems to me the quality most in demand if you are to write a lively new American novel. Thomas McGuane's book receives great publicity raves from novelists like Eastlake, L. Woiwode, William Hjortsberg and Edward Abbey (do you ken all of them?) but the first thing that occurred to me was to wonder why anybody would want to call his novel *The Bushwacked Piano.* Maybe because it's a crazy world and this novel once and for all will be the greatest picaresque since *Henderson the Rain King.* When I hear the word "picaresque" I don't exactly reach for my revolver, but do know when I'm depressingly in the *genre:*

> In Oakland, he saw two slum children sword fighting on a slag heap. In Palo Alto, a puffy fop in bursting jodhpurs shouted from the door of a luxurious stable, *"My horse is soiled!"* While one chilly evening in Union Square he listened to a wild-eyed woman declaim that she had seen delicate grandmothers raped by Kiwanis zombies, that she had seen Rotarian blackguards bludgeoning Easter bunnies in a coal cellar, that she had seen Irving Berlin buying an Orange Julius in Queens.

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Sure, sure. Watching these performers wheel out the latest toy in the catalogue brought to mind the vaudeville story about how an out-of-work family applied for a job, described in detail the various taboo acts they committed with one another, those acts to be capped by a collective urinating on the audience. "What do you call yourself?" inquired the baffled agent. "The Sophisticates" came back their earnest reply. One of our leading sophisticates in this mode for years has been Stanley Elkin who reaches something like mellow maturity in his latest effort with sentences like these—"His palsied old hand floated down to splash about in Carmella's crotch"—amply there for our delectation. The novel is frankly advertised as "very dirty" but also as "very funny" which latter I can assure you it is not unless you enjoy the prose about Carmella. As a book somehow "about" radio it was singularly devoid of interesting nostalgia, nor can even its information be trusted, as when the DJ introduces a song: "It was 'When the Lights Go on Again All Over the World', and as he listened to the lyrics ("Jimmy will go to sleep in his own little room again") he became furious." Could he have become furious because to the best of my trustworthy memory that lyric is to be found instead in "The White Cliffs of Dover"? Mr. Elkin was no doubt in a hurry to get on to his next wowser of a sophisticate joke.

It's no great pleasure to be in the pious position of finding American novels of no use to the spirit; furthermore I am aware of the fact that Farrell, McGuane, Mano et al are perfectly serious chaps who all could and probably do teach Creative Writing at some or other university. But they are also prisoners of the Black Humor or post-Black-Humor Zeitgeist and don't show enough signs of being unhappy with their state. What would I prefer? It will no doubt seem perverse to adduce the name of Linda Grace Hoyer, but the mother of John Updike has something to write about—among other things her son "Eric": "No, you weren't meant to be a teacher, Belle. You were meant to be Eric's mother. Nobody else could have been his mother."[4] I don't think it was just gossipy interest about life at the Hoyers and Updikes which made me read this novel (really a graceful sequence of episodes that simply trails off at the end) with admiration. The moments of humor have a toughness and understated modesty which Mrs. Hoyer doesn't even bother to signal; so when her mother goes for water to wash her ninety-year-old grandfather's feet the exchange is: " 'My feet aren't dirty.' 'Then the washing won't hurt.' 'No, not you,' he said." Or when the grandfather on the verge of death asks for a glass of Old Overholt, refuses to be put off with cider instead, waits red-faced until the booze is fetched from a tavern, then promptly expires. The best thing about *Enchantment* is how out of the fashion it is: all it tries to do is convey in intelligent sentences a writer's sense of life, other people, a place.

I was also pleased by the throwaway quality of many lines in Rich-

[4] ENCHANTMENT, by *Linda Grace Hoyer*. Houghton Mifflin. $5.95.

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ard Brautigan's latest historical romance.[5] First of all you get a frontispiece with real people on it, good-looking too, then a friendly dedication and a "Book I" entitled "Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight?" This is all before the abortion part starts, and our hero is alone, minding the library where various authors come and present a book they've written, then steal away into the night. Books like this: "MY TRIKE, by Chuck. The author was five years old . . ."; or "LOVE ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL, by Charles Green. The author was about fifty years old and said he had been trying to find a publisher for his book since he was seventeen years old . . . 'It has been rejected 459 times and now I am an old man' "; or "SAM SAM SAM by Patricia Evens Summers. 'It's a book of literary essays,' she said. 'I've always admired Alfred Kazin and Edmund Wilson . . . She was a woman in her late fifties who looked a good deal like Edmund Wilson"; or "HE KISSED ALL NIGHT by Susan Margar . . . You had to look twice to see if she had any lips on her face. It was a surprise to find her mouth almost totally hidden beneath her nose. 'It's about kissing,' she said." Brautigan and Linda Grace Hoyer would make a strange pair, yet I felt I knew where I was in relation to each writer, and at least had no fear of being bludgeoned to death by overactive prose.

There are amusing effects in James Jones's new book too but perhaps without the author's full awareness of them.[6] Though it won't do, as some reviewers like to think it will, to dissociate yourself from Jones on the supposed grounds that he "writes badly" (as if you knew what good writing was, and appreciated it in, say, Jane Austen) he has trouble in this book putting together private delights as a writer in Paris with the public events of May, 1968 when all those students uprose. So the friendly narrator has to pause from pouring out scotches for university kids and pass along some information about the meaning of the Sorbonne: "It was founded in the thirteenth century, and dedicated to those élite problems of the age: religion and politics. Throughout the Middle Ages it attracted the greatest scholars of Europe. St. Thomas Aquinas was one of its great masters. Latin was its language then, and its men played very important roles in nearly every big intellectual question of the age—such as how many angels can stand on the head of a pin." Nick Carraway or Adams on Scholasticism is pretty disastrous, especially since Jones isn't as clever as Fitzgerald or Hemingway. Nor as reticent; though he doesn't go into details of his lovemaking with Martine—a made-to-order French mistress who comes and cooks tasty dishes only after she removes her clothes right down to the lacy garterbelt, then changes after the expresso into a green "robe de boudoir" while he pours the brandies—these climactic words give away the game, "I suppose that we did just about everything that two people do together when making love to each other.

[5] THE ABORTION, by *Richard Brautigan*. Simon and Schuster. $1.95.

[6] THE MERRY MERRY MONTH OF MAY, by *James Jones*. Delacorte Press. $7.95.

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Martine was very experienced." Surely not "bad writing" but something else! After all this, as the narrator "snuggles back" into sleep when Martine leaves at 1:45 a.m., I decided that James Jones may be the victim of creeping self-satisfaction. A minor vice, though not productive of much interesting dramatic inwardness either, even with troubles at the Sorbonne and related excitements.

Just over a year ago I tried to express my admiration for Frederick Buechner's *The Entrance to Porlock,* a brilliantly textured, ingenious novel that left the reader dazzled, with perhaps the nagging feeling that there was a trick somewhere. Buechner, the opposite of James Jones, writes too *well,* gold on every page, and suddenly the nervous critic reaches for a word like contrivance, after which he feels himself morally elevated a notch. Buechner's new novel is, as the dust jacket claims, his best;[7] yet surely the plot as told looks suspiciously clever: Antonio Parr, an ex-teacher, sculptor in scrap iron, novelist manqué, answers an ad for a religious diploma mill, receives the degree in due course, then, though his twin sister is dying of bone cancer in New York, takes off for Florida to meet Mr. Leo Bebb, headman of the "college," and his assorted cast of oddities and pleasures (an assistant named "Brownie," a sexy girl named Sharon who makes good love). As with *The Entrance to Porlock* and earlier novels, Buechner teases the reader to make a coherent fabulous meaning out of the action, and as usual his writing is fertile with analogies and fantasies—religious, Hollywoodish, Florida-ad-mannish—from the Harrowing of Hell to Errol Flynn and Charlton Heston. It may be that Buechner works on the reader in somewhat the manner recommended by Eliot's *Three Voices of Poetry;* he constructs a complicated plot and excites us with analogical possibilities as a sort of sop to keep us occupied, while the real work of the novel goes on elsewhere. For me at least that real work is inseparable from the attractive humanizings of experience performed by the book's narrator, as in the following passage where he leaves Penn Station behind and moves toward Florida; first, however, traversing New Jersey:

> So I sat there in a kind of trance with my legs stretched out and my feet up on the closed lid of the john, looking through that window at that sad and to me oddly moving wilderness that you pass through when you first come out of the tunnel into Jersey. I felt like Dante being ferried across into limbo with the spirits of the doomed fluttering about him *come d'autunno si levan le foglie,* as he says—those autumn leaves again. And that tundra, those scrubby, colorless flatlands stretching away under the November sky. Those drab and dreamlike cities off in the distance—Jersey City, Hoboken, Secaucus? I know them only by name and have seen them only through the windows of year after year of trains. I do not know one from the

[7] LION COUNTRY, by *Frederick Buechner.* Atheneum. $5.95.

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> other or even that they stand where I think they do. Maybe they are on the other side of some other river. The gray sky with here and there some industrial Stonehenge black as soot against it. Once in a while a tower shooting up jets of fire. One of the few memories I have of my father is of his telling me once that during the Depression the poor people came and lived out there somewhere in shelters made of tin cans and old piano crates, and I thought of them there trying to keep warm on a raw and lonesome afternoon like this. I wondered idly if my father had actually seen them himself through just such a hastening window as mine. And then as nearly as is ever possible this side of dreamless sleep, I stopped thinking about anything . . . Schenectady, Schenectady, Schenectady, went the wheels on the tracks just as Reginald Gardiner used to say they did, and I watched the dusk gather over Newark, was it? Or Elizabeth, Rahway, Metuchen, those places that for all I knew existed only in my mind and barely there, so vacant and remote my mind had become, like the landscape we were passing.

Maybe this writing works best for people overly charmed by Nick Carraway, but I think there are worse voices to give in to, and the play of fancy, memory, trivia—Schenectady, Schenectady, Schenectady, —even the Dante, lightened into "those autumn leaves again,"—all work toward a powerful and beautiful creation. As Trilling says in relation to his discussion of narrative voice in *The Great Gatsby,* "It either gives us confidence in what is being said or it tells us that we do not need to listen; and it carries both the modulation and the living form of what is being said." If we really believed this, how many recent novelistic voices would we consent to listen to? Perhaps Buechner's, in the grip of middle-age, is one the likes of which will not be heard much longer from very many sides. I like to think not; but meanwhile let us be grateful for what he has given us: a book in which among its fantastic appurtenances, one of which is an unbelievably—perhaps unbelievable—happy ending, there are real children, a real woman dying of a wasting disease, real places in not just any country . . . Elizabeth, Rahway, Metuchen.

Buechner's "fabulation" then is modified by his sense of place, of human gesture and response; he is not free (as a recent book saluted other "fabulators" for being) from the recalcitrance and constraints of experience. But in the main these days you have to look elsewhere than to American novelists for truths that are truly stranger than fiction.[8] To Kuznetsov surely, whose "document in the form of a novel" (he was twelve years old when the Nazis captured Kiev) has been "reconstructed" with typographical distinctions between the originally published text (1966), the censored sections, and a good deal of new material written between 1967 and 1969. To give an idea briefly of

[8] BABI YAR, by *A. Anatoli (Kuznetsov).* Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $10.00. FOR THE GOOD OF THE CAUSE, by *Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Praeger.* $5.50.

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the kind of thing that was censored: here is a sentence about what captive Russians, led by German escorts, looked like—I italicize censored material: "They were filthy and unshaven and their eyes give the impression that they were utterly without *feeling or* sense. . . . The air was full of the sound of their movement; and they all took short, mincing steps, staring dumbly ahead, and only very rarely would one of them throw a *frightened* glance at me and Shurka. . ." After this partial blackout there is censored in toto a description of the prisoners pathetically scrambling for a cigarette butt. Much of the book has this kind of fascination for the reader who becomes actively involved in detecting the particular kind of heresy or deviation shown in a word or a paragraph. But the involvement is deeper, less detached than that. Kuznetsov is not without wiles; on page 65 he congratulates us for having read this far and urges us to go on reading to the end, for

> You see, what I am offering you is after all not an ordinary novel. It is a document, an exact picture of what happened. Just imagine that had you been born just one historical moment sooner, this might have been your life *and not just something to pick up and read. Fate plays with us as it wishes—we are just little microbes crawling about the globe.* You could have been me; you could have been born in Kiev, in Kurenyovka, and I could now have been you, reading this page.

"I was the man; I suffered; I was there." Even Whitman's heroic lines seem a bit literary after the paragraph from *Babi Yar,* while the book as a whole bears out the astonishing and unsettling truth spoken by that last sentence. I can't imagine a reader bland enough to resist Kuznetsov's offer.

Solzhenitsyn is deeper, more reserved and artful about his narrative, not—like Kuznetsov—dashing off excitedly in whatever direction he's suddenly impelled toward. His novella, first published in 1964, is interesting for the surrounding material in addition to its decent merits as a firmly blocked-out story (the newly-built technical school suddenly commandeered by the Party for purposes of a national research institute; the debate between old-style Stalinist administrator and new-man liberal who tends to ask questions like Why?). This material includes a good introduction to Solzhenitsyn's work by David Floyd and a fascinating Appendix in which appear various reviews and responses to reviews of the book from *Novy Mir* and other periodicals. So in a debate where readers argue about whether or not this kind of thing could happen in Russia today, somebody in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* named R. N. Seliverstov delivers himself as follows:

> Can that atmosphere of passivity and helplessness described by Solthenitsyn exist today in any community? I don't think so . . . It is not inertia or passivity that is characteristic of Soviet man; nor are these features typical of our public life. Genuine justice, fought

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> for and won by the Party and our whole people—and not "abstract" justice—runs through our life today and is triumphant!

I was thus freshly made aware of why it is important to pay attention to Solzhenitsyn, and why, as with Kuznetsov though in a different way, one's self as a pure reader of novels is interestingly complicated by, as it were, surrounding material. Or as the conflict is put in the book itself, when Lidia Georgievna pleads to the party secretary that the school be spared, "But what is there for you to disagree with, Lidia Georgievna?" "First of all," and saying this she drew herself up and moved toward him, "first of all . . . well, it's your whole tone!" This response is of course what R. N. Seliverstov, like the Party Official, can't understand, and why Solzhenitsyn has to go on writing.

Shiva Naipaul's first novel is impressively painstaking in its leisurely portrait of strange manners in Trinidad's Hindu community, and they really *are* strange, it's not just my provincialism. The author takes the risk, halfway through the book, of killing off his hero, a bus-driver named (splendidly) Ram Lutchman who marries above him into the Khoja family, is soon bored with his wife, annoyed by his children, takes a mistress, repents and eventually succumbs to a fatal attack while working in the garden. From then on things tend to prolong themselves beyond necessity, since Shiva Naipaul is not one to conclude anything precipitately. But the real pleasure in *Fireflies*[9] is its solidity of specification, the informing presence of an affectionate and contemptuous narrator who manages to take his characters seriously and at the same time hold them off for amused contemplation. Here is Mr. Lutchman alone at the end of a Christmas eve dinner to which he has invited his former mistress and a sometime friend named Willkie, and which just does not come off the way it was meant to. Mrs. Lutchman clears the table and heads into the kitchen while Ram rather groggily settles into his chair:

> With the room lit only by the Christmas tree, the shadows grew monstrous in the semidarkness, playing with greater energy across the walls and ceiling. There was a noisy bustle of cars and people on the street. The cinema on the corner was having a late night show, and groups of young men, singing and swearing, drifted slowly along the pavements. Mr. Lutchman, disturbed by the shouts and the lights flashing past the windows, opened his eyes and stared sleepily around him. Wrapping paper littered the floor near the Christmas tree, and there were wine stains on the tablecloth, which had almost fallen away from the table. The smell of stale food was strong. One or two of the balloons had burst during the course of the evening and most of the others hung limp and flaccid from their strings. "Sonofabitch," he muttered, thinking of the balloon seller and his promises. . . .

[9] FIREFLIES, by *Shiva Naipaul*. Knopf. $7.95.

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Eventually he goes to bed, but it is not only the balloon seller whose promises to Mr. Lutchman never burst into performance; life itself just won't come across. Shiva Naipaul's achievement is to invest Mr. Lutchman's repeated "Sonofabitch," or its puzzled equivalent, with some poignancy as well as comic truth.

I have not been able to read John McGahern's two novels, but on the basis of his recent collection of short stories I shall certainly do so.[10] Those like me who approach any collection of stories with a sinking heart and a shifty eye (here we go again, well that one's finished, on to the next) would do well to have their scepticism challenged by McGahern's strong artistry. Everywhere is the sense of place, dully apparent, fully there:

> Fear of the sky since morning had kept them on the benches away from the strand a mile downhill they'd come to enjoy, fear of the long trudge past the Golf Links and Kincora and Central in rain; but they'd still the air here, sea air, it was some consolation. Even the strand, reached in good weather, the mile downhill accomplished, the mile home uphill yet out of mind, and in possession of strand of Strandhill, long and level for miles, the cannon on its rotting initial-covered carriage pointed towards the Atlantic as if on guard over the two ice-cream parlours; women at the tideline, with a child in one hand and skirt held tight between thighs with the other, shinnying at each spent rush of water at their feet before it curled in a brown backwash round their heels . . .
>
> ("Strandhill, The Sea")

The air of *Dubliners* hangs heavy over most of these stories, but not oppressively so since McGahern is willing to trust his prose for the expression of personal feeling which, like Shiva Naipaul, he is not merely interested in deflating. Like Joyce he is good on stories done through the child's eye, and if "Araby" seems the best of the early *Dubliners* McGahern makes good use of that impulse in a fine story called "Bomb Box" where a supposedly dying father prepares his oldest child to assume control of the family, hands the child the key to a box in which instructions will be found, then takes to his bed, then mysteriously refuses to die. The story ends with the father restored to his usual health and heavy authority while the son guiltily carries around the key in his pocket for some weeks. Then, "Eventually, one warm evening, with some anxiety, I threw it as far away towards the river as I was able, watching its flight curve between the two ash trees to fall into the sedge and wild nettles a few feet from the water." The kind of poise manifested in this beautifully accurate sentence is found often throughout the book, and John McGahern will most certainly be heard from in the future.

[10] NIGHTLINES, by *John McGahern*. Little-Brown. $4.95.

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It is good to end fiction chronicles on a swelling note of praise, but this one must be an exception, even if the culminating writers are surely as respected and considerable as anyone today operating under the category of British Novelist (though Anthony Burgess has been living in Malta and in Princeton, N. J. while Doris Lessing in this novel is scarcely the solid chronicler of life in England).[11] Let us take up Burgess first, since the case presented by his new novel is less complicated to deal with. In writing about him admiringly a number of years ago, I prophesied that increasingly he would serve no master but language itself, and one could see in the second half of *Enderby* published four years ago a purer exploitation of organized violence upon language than was previously evident even in such an inveterate wordman as Burgess. The point being not that *A Clockwork Orange* or *The Wanting Seed* were less daring in their use of language's resources, but that in both cases they were strongly plotted novels with heroes and heroines who, no matter how they talked, still commanded the kind of fictional belief appropriate to characters from more realistic novel-environments. For all the strange and fancy things going on linguistically in those novels, we still suffer with Beatrice-Joanna; and it is distinctly painful to treat others and be treated by them as the "I" in *A Clockwork Orange* does and is. The same could be said about the first half of *Enderby* (originally published in England as *Inside Mr. Enderby* by "Joseph Kell," though written by Burgess at about the same time as the novels just mentioned); witness the comic painfulness of Enderby's lonely, disastrous attempt to cook up a lively batch of Spaghetti Fromaggio Surprise. But as the novel was continued it became picaresque, less humanly responsive to its hero, more concerned with piling up fantastic scenes created in spectacular language. And the result seemed to me a falling-off from the more warmly depressed atmosphere of its earlier part.

Now, with *MF,* there is simply nobody to care about in the least. The narrator-hero's approach to his reader has become correspondingly free, untied to anything:

> Don't try distilling a message from it, not even an expresso cupful of meaningful epitome or a Sambuca glass of abridgment, *con la mosca.* Communication has been the whatness of the communication. For separable meaning go to the professors, whose job it is to make a meaning out of anything. . . .

The narrator then goes on (playfully? scornfully?) to hand us out a few separable meanings, and, avoiding the herd of professors supposedly crowded around, I declined all of them except perhaps the brief hint about communication being the whatness of the communication. It

[11] MF, by *Anthony Burgess.* Knopf. $5.95. BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT TO HELL, by *Doris Lessing.* Knopf. $6.95.

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strikes me that the "whatness" of *MF* is no more, no less than a sheer untrammeled violence upon language which overwhelms any possible stirrings of belief in story or in character or in meaning as anything more than a professorial game. Here is a typical paragraph in which the hero disposes of some decaying meat he'd bought awhile back:

> . . . The beef was as alive as a telephone exchange. I picked up the dish, averting my eyes, and walked as steadily as a waiter to the front door, out, up the narrow path, the meat computerizing like mad, and then safaried through the overgrown garden to a point from which I hurled the gesturing meat into bramble, ranunculus and monstrous cocoacolored leaves. Newly environmented, the decaying horror became part of the life cycle. For good measure I threw also the china dish, but that would be only a fracted artifact, unabsorbable into any ultimate meaning, a mere mean signpost of transient frivolous culture.

This is brilliant, serving of nothing but the language itself; but I was made uneasy and finally depressed by a novel that skates on such marvelous thin ice or freelances out along this razor's edge. Which is perhaps to say no more than that I've never had that much fun at Finnegans Wake, and that, with no right to urge it, I would love to see Anthony Burgess come more deeply and truly to terms with the surfaces of things he rendered so finely in books like *The Right to an Answer* or his early Malayan trilogy. Maybe since *MF* takes us about as far as a novel can in the direction of pure play (could I be wrong?) my new prophecy will come as true as the last one did.

Doris Lessing is a more problematical case, and I am perhaps temperamentally incapable of responding to her work with the serious attention given to it by a number of reviewers, interestingly of late by Joan Didion and Benjamin DeMott. We are asked (Miss Didion makes the comparison explicit) to think of her as a novelist on the order of Dreiser who either disdains to write handsome sentences, create good dialogue, render places solidly there, or is unable to do these things because of her stern concentration on higher or deeper matters. Like Dreiser, she may write badly but (therefore? however? nevertheless?) she touches the heart or mind or soul. DeMott admits that the new novel isn't well-proportioned and suffers from under-dramatization (he characterized her last book, *The Four-Gated City*, as "not wholly unwearying," surely a gentle way of pointing to the massive boredom felt as I ploughed along through that book), but he reminds us that "Writers who mean to add something to human knowledge in the form of philosophical truth are often more permissive than estheticians about untidy composition, garrulity, repetitiousness, circularity." Of course no reader wants to take on the demeaning role of fussy esthetician, but I am less certain than Mr. DeMott that Doris Lessing (or Dreiser for that matter) is adding anything to human knowledge in the form of

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philosophic truth. DeMott's claim, and it is a major one, is that she is one of the few writers in the West in whose books the human aspiration to feel towards a more habitable world, to move out beyond the cramped, limited selves we usually walk around in, "is allowed to breathe without shame, hysteria, or ironical defensiveness." Leaving aside the question of whether the absence of such ignoble motives isn't in itself a reduction of our humanity, and remembering too that Miss Lessing is at least as humorless as Dreiser, the philosophical truth of such aspiration seems to have come to a head in her last two, and what seem to me clearly her worst, novels. In *The Four-Gated City* we were treated to an endless LSD trip where Martha and Lynda got to know at least part of what lay beyond their cramped limited selves, while the reader (as memories of *Easy Rider* presented themselves) struggled along, serious-faced. Now in the new *Briefing*, the hero has already cracked at the novel's beginning (or he was sent down from a planet to earth, a descent into hell) and Miss Lessing has chosen a sort of LSD-prose to express the contents of this fellow's mind:

> . . . I saw how the earth and its moon cycled and circled and how both earth and water pulsed and swelled and vibrated on Earth, as matter swelled and moved and vibrated on the Moon, on the cold moon, on the cold dead moon, the warm Earth's cold sister, the stepchild, the terrible moon who sucks and leeches and clutches on to the warm earth that was alive, for the moon wanted to live, the moon *would* live, the moon was like a poor sad still-born babe, but the baby would live, it fought to live . . .

And so on. If you can get through this prose, which takes up the first half of the novel, there will eventually be, in the letter of one Rosemary Baines to our hero, some more humanly interesting developments. But how could they be any less? What would Groucho Marx say to the sentence quoted above, let alone Flaubert or Ford M. Ford? But R. D. Laing, as Miss Didion suggests, would be proud to find his way around such an imagined world, and if you think that fiction stranger than truth can tellingly be written in such a style, assuming that style matters at all, then you will find Miss Lessing's novel fascinating. I can only applaud Joan Didion's opening sentences: "To read a great deal of Doris Lessing over a short span of time is to feel that the original hound of heaven has commandeered the attic. She holds the mind's other guests in ardent contempt." To which might be added that the reader, as another guest, is held in equally ardent contempt by the single-minded righteousness of such dedication. That Miss Lessing has largely gotten away with it seems to me one of the more puzzling things in recent literary culture, and a good deal stranger than truth.

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